The Cloud of Unknowing

AND OTHER TREATISES

by an English Mystic
of the Fourteenth Century

edited by
Abbot Justin McCann, O. S. B.

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Written in Chaucer's fourteenth century England, *The Cloud of Unknowing* reveals a spiritual writer of great force and originality, a master of singularly vigorous and eloquent English.

Here is a trumpet-call to a most definite and most difficult life of the spirit—a call addressed to everyone, for none may be excluded from the highest life that is within man's power under God's grace; but at the same time, a call that can be heard and obeyed only by the few, by those souls exceptionally endowed by nature and by grace. The author himself is fully aware of this fact and he takes pains, in his prologue and in his book, to utter two warnings: first, that he is writing for those who have devoted themselves sincerely with all due preparation and advice to "that life which is called contemplative"; and, secondly, that his book must be read and pondered as a whole.

Besides *The Cloud,* this volume also contains the *Epistle of Privy Counsel* and the translation of *Denis Hid Divinity,* all by the same author, together with a commentary on *The Cloud* by Abbot Augustine Baker, O.S.B.

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THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING

AND OTHER TREATISES

by

AN ENGLISH MYSTIC OF
THE FOURTEENTH CENTURY

With a Commentary
on the Cloud by

FATHER AUGUSTINE BAKER
O.S.B.

Edited by

ABBOT JUSTIN McCANN
Monk of Ampleforth

THE NEWMAN PRESS
WESTMINSTER, MARYLAND

PERMISSV SVPERIORVM O.S.B.

NIHIL OBSTAT: GEORGIVS SMITH, S.T.D., PH.D.
CENSOR DEPVTATVS
IMPRIMATVR: E. MORROGH BERNARD
VICARIVS GENERALIS
WESTMONASTERII: DIE X SEPTEMBRIS MCMLI

First edition	1924
Second edition	1936
Third edition	1942
Fourth edition	1943
Fifth edition	1947
Sixth and revised edition	1952

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY THE BROADWATER PRESS LTD
WELWYN GARDEN CITY, HERTFORDSHIRE

PREFACE

IT is now more than a quarter-century since the first edition of this book appeared. When I was preparing that edition, none of the texts had been printed in its original form, so that it was necessary for me to base my work upon the manuscripts. This is happily no longer true of the two major texts. The reader conversant with Middle English has now available to him a scholarly edition of the authentic text of those two treatises.[1] I welcome Dr Hodgson's book very sincerely.

Nevertheless, I suppose that the general reader will still have need of my modern version. That version has been carefully revised, by means of Dr Hodgson's text, but remains in substance what it was in the first edition. It is a version which seeks to keep close to the original text, yet modifies that text regularly in respect of spelling and vocabulary. No excuse need be offered for the first modification; for the second I plead the needs of the modern reader. I could, indeed, have done generally what I have done occasionally, viz. retained the obsolete words and glossed them in the footnotes; but, doing so, I should have left the reader with a text full of obstacles and should have enlarged the footnotes very considerably. For this second modification I felt, in the first instance, much compunction and offered express apologies; now that the original text of *Cloud* and *Epistle* has been published, I have no such feeling and consider that I may be allowed to dispense with apologies.

I think I may dispense also with my account of the manuscripts used for the above-mentioned texts, referring the reader to the complete and scientific account of all the manuscripts which is given by Dr Hodgson. I am able to do the same for *Denis Hid Divinity*, having been allowed to see the text which Dr Hodgson has prepared for her forthcoming edition (in E.E.T.S.) of the five minor treatises that are commonly attributed to the author of the

[1] *The Cloud of Unknowing* and *The Epistle of Privy Counselling*. Edited from the manuscripts, with introduction, notes, and glossary, by Phyllis Hodgson, M.A. (Cantab.), B.Litt., D.Phil. (Oxon.). Published for the Early English Text Society by the Oxford University Press, London, 1944.

Cloud. My text has been revised carefully by means of that text, of which Dr Hodgson will give a scientific account. So I am able to confine myself to the following brief account of three further items that occur in my book:

1. *Fr Baker's Commentary*, Ampleforth MSS. 43 and 44.

2. *Latin version* of the *Cloud* (cited in the footnotes), MS. Bodley 856 (early fifteenth century). There is another Latin version in Pembroke College (Cambridge) MS. 221, dated 1491. I had assumed that this was a duplicate; but Dr Hodgson shows that it is an independent version and based on a better English text.

3. *Baker version* of *Cloud* and *Epistle* (cited in the footnotes), Ampleforth MS. 42. For an account of this version I refer the reader to the first chapter of Fr Baker's commentary.

Another old text sometimes cited in the notes is the Middle English version of the *Scala Claustralium* (see footnote, p. 50). Dr Hodgson hopes to print this text in her forthcoming volume. The present writer published it in a modernized form in 1924, in the *Ampleforth Journal* (Vol. xxx, pp. 7-19), and subsequently (1926) in pamphlet form. He is preparing an entirely new edition of this pamphlet which will be published by Stanbrook Abbey.

INTRODUCTION

THE *Cloud of Unknowing* was written in England in that fourteenth century—Chaucer's century—which in our own country produced Richard Rolle, Walter Hilton, and Julian of Norwich, and abroad John Tauler, Blessed Henry Suso, Blessed John Ruysbroeck, and St Catherine of Siena. These names will suggest peace and contemplative devotion, but it was not a century that was conspicuously either peaceful or contemplative. Both in England and on the Continent of Europe there was frequent war, and the distress and unrest that follow on war. The earlier part of the century finds England embroiled with the Scots and suffering the signal defeat of Bannockburn (1314). Edward the Third (1327–77), whose reign covers so large a part of the century, carried on an almost continual war with France, which, though marked by the victories of Crecy and Poictiers, yet issued in mere failure. In the last quarter of the century social distress manifests itself in popular insurrection.

Nor was the Church in a more peaceful state. The fourteenth century witnessed the captivity of Avignon (1305–78) and the commencement of the Great Schism of the West (1378). With the Church thus afflicted at its centre, it is not surprising that its authority was weakened and its work impaired. In England the Great Plague of the middle of the century, by decimating the clergy, did more harm than can be estimated. The end of the century saw the agitations of John Wyclif and the rise of Lollardy.

Such were the times in which our author lived. His writings, and those of his contemporaries, are evidence that it was possible for a man—in spite of all this, and perhaps because of all this—to possess his soul in peace, and that there were many more like him. They are evidence that through all there persisted a Christian life which was superior to secular disturbance, and they bid us refrain from depicting this century—any more than another—as one of unrelieved conflict and social stress. What part, if any, our author played in the affairs of his time we do not know. We can only say that it was in this century that his life was lived and conjecture that

it coincided roughly with the fifty years of the reign of King Edward the Third. Towards the end of this period, in the last quarter of the century, were written the *Cloud* and its attendant treatises, some six in number. Chief among these latter, and by far the most remarkable, is the *Epistle of Privy Counsel*, which stands to the *Cloud* in the relation of a pendant or postscript. It was, perhaps, the last work that the author wrote. Associated with both, and undoubtedly from the same pen, are five other treatises: *Denis Hid Divinity*, *Benjamin*, the *Epistle of Prayer*, the *Epistle of Discretion*, and the treatise *Of Discerning of Spirits*. Of these seven treatises, the first three are printed here, while the four that remain may be found in E. G. Gardner's *Cell of Self-Knowledge* (1910, and reprinted). When this present book first appeared (1924) the *Cloud* had already been printed twice: by Father Henry Collins (1871) from the inferior sixteenth-century recension, and by Miss Evelyn Underhill (1912) from fifteenth-century MSS. in the British Museum. The *Epistle of Privy Counsel* and *Denis Hid Divinity* were printed in my book for the first time, although some selections from the former had been prefixed by Father Collins to his edition of the *Cloud*. All the printed editions just mentioned are editions in which the original text has undergone some modernization. As already indicated in the Preface, the *Cloud* and *Epistle* have now been printed in their original form. The editor of these texts has ready for the press a similar edition of the author's remaining treatises.

While it is very generally admitted that in the author of these treatises we have a spiritual writer of great force and originality, and the master of a singularly vigorous and eloquent English, yet all attempts to discover his identity have so far failed, and the problem of the authorship remains unsolved, if not insoluble. The *Cloud* has, indeed, been attributed to Walter Hilton (died 1396), and also, but with plain error, to the sixteenth-century Carthusians, Blessed William Exmew and Maurice Chauncey. The first attribution is an attractive one, and has at least three points in its favour: Hilton's dates are exactly right; Hilton's locality (Thurgarton, in Notts.) agrees with Dr Hodgson's conclusion (on linguistic grounds) that the *Cloud* and its attendant treatises were written "in a central district of the North-east Midlands"; Hilton was the choice in 1500

of the Carthusian, Dom James Greenhalgh, a diligent student of Rolle, Hilton, and our author, the "annotator" cited in several of my notes. Against the attribution is the contrast in style and temper, if not in teaching, between the *Cloud* and Hilton's *Scale of Perfection*. It is much to be desired that some patient scholar should subject these two texts to exact analysis and comparison.

Meanwhile, abstaining from any identification of the author, we may content ourselves with a general characterization. The author of the *Cloud* was a priest and a theologian. Apart from the general theological equipment which he shared with the normal "learned clerk" of his period, he displays a special interest in mystical theology. In this region his chief authority is the unknown writer (perhaps a Syrian monk of about the year A.D. 500) who chose to issue his profound treatises under the style of "Dionysius the Areopagite" (Acts xvii. 34), and thus obtained for them a quasi-apostolic authority. Our author claims expressly for his teaching the authority of Denis (*Cloud*, Chap. 70), and his influence is obvious both in the *Cloud* and in the *Epistle of Privy Counsel*. The author's *Hid Divinity* is a free version of the *Mystical Theology* of Denis.

He was conversant also with the medieval commentators on the Areopagite. He uses the twelfth-century Latin version of Johannes Sarracenus and the thirteenth-century Latin paraphrase of Thomas Gallus, a Canon of St Victor who became Abbot of St Andrew's, Vercelli (1219–46). This paraphrase was widely current under the title of *Extractio Vercellensis*. Less widely known and used were the voluminous Dionysian commentaries by the same Abbot Thomas; but our author shows himself acquainted with these also. Last, but not least, we mention another Victorine, viz. that specialist in mystical theology, Richard of St Victor. To him several chapters of the *Cloud* are very closely indebted, and there are many incidental borrowings, some of which are mentioned in the notes to this edition. Moreover, the author's *Benjamin* is a free rendering of Richard's *Benjamin Minor*.

This special interest in mystical theology would of itself tend to give the author's writings a certain esoteric quality, and he intensifies this quality by the vigour and even ruthlessness with which he applies his principles. This is not to say that the *Cloud* is unorthodox or even eccentric; but it does mean that it follows a relatively

singular way. Dr Hodgson adduces in parallel to the *Cloud* the remarkable little book known as the *De adhaerendo Deo*, which has been attributed to St Albert the Great. It is an apt and valuable parallel.

Is it possible to learn more than this about the author from internal evidence, i.e. from incidental passages which seem to have a personal quality? On the basis of such passages various writers have reached various conclusions about him, a circumstance which would of itself tend to discourage us. And I confess that for myself I am now less and less disposed to attribute to such passages a factual quality. I am not at all sure, for instance, that the disciple to whom the book is addressed is any more than a lay figure. There are too many cases, from the *Mystical Theology* of Denis onwards, of spiritual treatises addressed to imaginary personages. It is a natural and convenient technique; but it does not provide biographical information. And, in the passages of the *Cloud* which appear to be providing that sort of information, the master and his disciple are closely interlocked. So I am sceptical of their value for the biography of the author, and I propose, on this occasion, to attempt no further delineation of him than has been provided already.

The spiritual teaching of the *Cloud* may present difficulty to some readers, and an attempt shall now be made to explain it. What is said of the *Cloud* applies also to the *Epistle of Privy Counsel*.

The *Cloud* is the work of a man of great gifts of mind and heart, who possessed also a remarkable power of vivid expression. The result is the work that we know, distinguished by many passages of great literary beauty, and instinct with profound thought and a contagious enthusiasm. And yet it is a difficult book, and one that is open to misunderstanding. For mysticism proper—as distinguished from philosophical theory or vague feeling or literary pleasure—is a practical thing, something more than a doctrine, a life. And the summons of the *Cloud* is a trumpet-call to a most definite and most difficult life of the spirit. It is a call which may indeed be addressed to all, for none may be excluded from the highest life that is within man's power under God's grace; but at the same time it is a call that —it seems—can only be heard and obeyed by the few, by souls exceptionally endowed by nature and by grace. The author himself is fully alive to this fact, and he takes pains, in his prologue and in his book, to utter and emphasize two warnings: first, that he is

writing for those, and those only, who have devoted themselves genuinely, with all due preparation and advice, to "that life that is called contemplative"; and, secondly, that his book must be read and pondered as a whole. These warnings are completely justified, and we may be excused for repeating them here. Fr Baker was a man of no small experience in the things of the spirit, and he had, moreover, practised for himself the course of prayer that is recommended in the *Cloud*. It will be seen from his commentary that he goes so far as to doubt whether such high mystical doctrine is fit to be published at all, so great is the danger of misunderstanding. And he warns us that "whosoever upon reading of this book of the *Cloud* would of his own head put himself to the exercise of the work therein so much commended, he would but utterly deceive himself. Yea! if God do not put and bring him into the work—which God doth not but by many degrees—he can never understand what the work is which our author meaneth; and therefore how can he rightly hit upon it? But he will fall into some foolish work or other, according to his own brain or imagination, the which cannot bring him to any good end. And therefore, to be able to perform the work so much commended by the author of the *Cloud*, the man must dispose himself by former exercises and must await the divine call and enablement." It is well said, and in entire agreement with our author's teaching. If we repeat these warnings here, with what may seem unnecessary emphasis, it is because the book, while entirely innocuous for those lovers of mysticism who are content to enjoy its literary beauty, may yet fall into the hands of some such readers as the author desired. To such it may be said, with Fr Baker, that "the book in itself is an excellent book," but that it must be read carefully and practised with caution, and that its teaching must be subordinated always to the vocation and grace of the individual soul.

The author of the *Cloud* was, as has been said already, a diligent student of that unknown writer who chose to issue his profound treatises under the style of "Dionysius the Areopagite"; Denis is his mystical teacher. The psychology and the allegories which he takes from St Augustine and Richard of St Victor are of small importance in comparison with that main theory of the mystical effort which he adopts from the Areopagite. About this theory a few words are necessary here.

Denis is profoundly impressed with the thought of the transcendence and incomprehensibility of God. So transcendent is his infinite Being that no human words are able to describe him. We may take all the highest words of human language and apply them to God; but we do not express his Being. We may go further and speak of him as the super-Good, the super-Beautiful, the super-True; but still we fall short. And, in fact, we reach more nearly to him when, pursuing the "negative way", we say that he is neither good, nor beautiful, nor true—as we understand those words. And what is true of language is true also of thought. Let us form the noblest conceptions we may of goodness, and beauty, and truth, we still must fail to comprehend God; let us take these conceptions and raise them to their highest power, we are yet far from God. But if we cease from this effort, recognize our limitations and the infinite transcendence of God, and, accepting the darkness of our ignorance, reach out in a way above mind to him who is above mind, then (like Moses on Sinai) we pass within the cloud, we enter the "divine dark", and are united in a way that surpasses reason and cannot be expressed by language to the incomprehensible and inexpressible God.

It is characteristic of the writings of Denis that he makes great use of paradox. God is light, but he is also darkness; he is being, but he is also not-being; and so forth. He is endeavouring to convey the infinite transcendence of God and the inadequacy of human expression. So far, indeed, has he carried this effort, that some have been led to maintain that he severs God utterly from all possible contact with human knowledge, and leaves man in a stark impossibility of commerce with him. But this is a misunderstanding of his emphasis. In spite of all that exaggeration of language which he feels bound to use in order to express the incomprehensibility of God, yet man can attain God. For in and through his recognition of his own impotence and of the limitations of his thought—that is to say, in the darkness of his ignorance, in his cloud of unknowing—man is united to God. The transcendent Being becomes immanent; the incomprehensible is in some way comprehended; and there is achieved a close union of man's finite being with the Being of the Infinite. This, as Denis conceives it, is the highest life of the spirit and the goal towards which the mystic should direct his efforts.

The first chapter of the *Mystical Theology* treats of the "divine darkness". By this he means two correlative and complementary things: human ignorance and divine incomprehensibility. The same is true of our author's "cloud of unknowing". The mystic accepts this darkness, and through it attains a perfect illumination. For though the Psalmist says that *He hath made darkness his hiding place* (xvii. 12), and that *clouds and darkness surround him* (xcvi. 2), yet *God is light and in him there is no darkness* (1 John i. 5). And therefore Denis speaks of this darkness as "most luminous" and as a darkness that "shines brighter than light", and "illuminates the soul with splendours of unapproachable beauty". In effect, therefore, both Denis and our author would lead the soul, not into a hopeless obscurity and darkness, but to a supreme revelation. The process entails abstraction from sense and from ordinary human knowledge, and therefore is it called ignorance and unknowing; but it leads to a higher knowledge and a wonderful experience of God. The mind ceases, indeed, to consider this or that divine attribute, ceases from any vain effort at comprehending the incomprehensible; but it raises itself up to that which is highest of all, the pure Being of God, and in an inexpressible way is united with this Being.

Denis himself refrains from any further explanation of this "union", but it will be noticed that the author of the *Cloud* characterizes it as an act of will and of love, and that his version of the *Mystical Theology* contains this interpretation. It is the interpretation of Vercellensis. That commentator writes thus of the *Mystical Theology*: "In this book he has given us another and an incomparably more profound manner of knowing God—namely, a super-intellectual and supersubstantial manner—which was hidden from pagan philosophy, because the philosophers neither sought it nor thought it existed, nor understood the faculty whereby it is set in the soul. For they thought that the highest cognitive faculty was the intellect, whereas there is another which as far excels the intellect as the intellect does the reason, or the reason the imagination; and this is the higher will (*principalis affectio*), and the same is the spark of conscience (*scintilla synderesis*) which alone may be united to the divine Spirit. . . In this exercise sense, imagination, reason, and intellect are suspended . . . and the point of the higher will (*apex affectionis principalis*) is united to the divine Spirit itself. . . This is

the *best part* of Mary. . . This wisdom is obtained by a great fervour of love towards God and a strong straining of the spirit towards the eternal objects of wisdom (*aeterna spectacula sapientiae*)."[1]

St Bonaventure[2]—in the same century—teaches that the highest mystical experience is not an exercise of the intellect, but of the will; it is a union, a quasi-ecstatic union of love. This love transcends all understanding and knowledge. All the other powers of the soul are silent and sleep, while the affective power keeps vigil. *Ego dormio, sed cor meum vigilat.* Love alone has the entry to the secrets of God. *Ibi non intrat intellectus, sed affectus.* Hugh of St Victor had said, "Love knocks and enters, but knowledge stands without," and this thought inspires the Victorines, St Bernard and St Bonaventure. For Vercellensis, apparently, it meant the complete supersession of the intellect; and there were not wanting later those who maintained that all "knowing", antecedent or concomitant, was absent from the mystical act.[3] But a more temperate school—and our author seems to belong to it—holding fast to the doctrine that there is no willing without knowing (*nil volitum nisi praecognitum*), refused to depose the intellect. Thus St Thomas Aquinas insists abundantly on the immediacy of love, and maintains that we are united to God more intimately by love than by knowledge (*Per affectum homo perfectius Deo conjungitur quam per intellectum. Amor est magis unitivus quam cognitio. Magis intrat amor ad rem quam cognitio. Plus diligitur quam intelligitur, quia intrat dilectio ubi scientia foris est. In statu viae Deum per essentiam amamus, non autem videmus*); but he does not push this doctrine to the point of discarding the intellect.[4] Nor, if we read the *Cloud* attentively, shall we accuse the author of

[1] Merton College MS. 69, fol. 131*b*. In his paraphrase of the Mystical Theology (cap. 1) he writes: *Per unitionem dilectionis, quae effectiva est verae cognitionis, unitur Deo intellectualiter ignoto cognitione multo meliori quam sit cognitio intellectualis.*

[2] See especially his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum.*

[3] As in the controversy over the *Docta Ignorantia* of Nicholas of Cusa.

[4] In his commentary on the *Divine Names* (vii. 3), St Thomas thus expounds Denis: *Cognoscimus Deum per ignorantiam, per quamdam unitionem ad divina supra naturam mentis. . . Et sic cognoscens Deum in tali statu cognitionis illuminatur ab ipsa profunditate divinae Sapientiae, quam perscrutari non possumus.*

anti-intellectualism. He desires to simplify thought, but not to abolish it; and throughout the mystical process there remains an apprehension, however dark, of the Being of God.

Turning from Denis and Vercellensis to the *Cloud*, we find clear traces of their influence on the author. The *Cloud* may be said to be a commentary on the sentence quoted by the author from Denis: *the most godly knowing of God is that the which is known by unknowing*. He calls his book the *Cloud of Unknowing* because of the same conviction that God is to be attained in this life (in the highest way that he may be attained), not by the way of knowledge, but by the way of ignorance. Following the guidance of Vercellensis, and emphasizing the antithesis of reason and will, of knowing and loving, he teaches his disciple to put away discursive thought and to simplify the intellective act, but above all to love. For "love may reach to God in this life, but not knowing." Or again: "I would leave all that thing that I can think, and choose to my love that thing that I cannot think. For he may well be loved, but not thought. By love may he be gotten and holden; but by thought neither." Therefore the disciple who is called to this work must endeavour to put aside the lower activities of the soul, to check the imagination, to silence the discursive reason, which would be busy with various meditations, and to reduce the intellective act to a very simple contemplation of God's Being. That object baffles man's understanding, and his contemplation is therefore ignorance and unknowing; but this ignorance is a better thing than all the knowledge that is within man's grasp. The natural man will say that this work is nought; but the contemplative must wrestle always with this "blind nought", for this nought is all. Therefore at the height of his effort the contemplative is face to face with a dark *cloud of unknowing*. Upon this cloud his will has to beat "with a sharp dart of longing love", and this willing, this "little blind love" is the whole of his exercise.

Thus the chief work is performed by the will, which exercises a continual effort of love. There is in man's will a rapid succession of "stirrings" (impulses or acts of will) which are as numerous as the smallest moments of time. It is a consequence of original sin that these stirrings are dissipated in a variety of directions; the will is distracted by sense, imagination, curious thought; it is the business of the contemplative to put away all these sources of distraction, so

that of the acts of his will "none shall go astray, but all stretch unto the sovereign desirable and unto the highest willable thing, the which is God." This elimination of distraction is indeed the part of this work that is proper to the man himself, for the positive effort of the contemplative depends upon God: it is "never gotten by study, but only by grace". It is very important—as in all this work—not to conceive these spiritual acts in a fleshly or bodily manner, as some do to their hurt and delusion. There is nothing corporeal or sensible about them, although they be sometimes accompanied by sensible experiences; they are acts of the spiritual will. They should not be artificial or violent, but spring gently and sweetly from love to love. They need no expression in words or gestures, and yet they may be so expressed; for, after all, man is body and soul, and should serve God with both. If they are expressed, their simplicity will best be represented by a monosyllable such as GOD or LOVE, which the contemplative soul will iterate fast and often, with a full spirit, in unison with the acts of his will. His personal prayers will ever be characterized by this simplicity, and "short prayer pierceth heaven."

Therefore the author regards the "work" of this book as an energy or act, and the contemplative life as a series of such acts. The work may be perfectly achieved even in one single act. Properly conceived, such an act is but a "sudden stirring, and as it were unadvised, speedily springing unto God as a sparkle from the coal". A man may prepare the ground by removing all obstacles, but there are no positive means by which he can attain this work of himself; for it is in the gift of God. The novice should be diligent in reading, thinking, and praying; but when he can practise this work he will need little reading or thinking, and his prayer will be greatly simplified. It is a "little blind love set on God", a "secret setting of love", a "devout stirring of love wrought in the will by God", a "blind stirring unto God and a secret setting upon this cloud of unknowing"; the soul "hangs up her love and her longing desire in this cloud", and in this "loving stirring and blind beholding" is her prayer.

In the exercise of this work, in this "beating on this dark cloud of unknowing", the contemplative attains a comprehension of God which is beyond the power of the intellect and a foretaste of the

bliss of heaven. Although at first he finds only darkness and feels only a "naked intent" of his will unto God, yet he must abide in this darkness; for only here can God be felt or known, so far as that is possible in this life. And sometimes, if not often, he will come very near to the object of his striving; for he may in some measure pierce this cloud "with a sharp dart of longing love", and this is the consummation of the work of this book. There is, indeed, a higher experience still, wherein God himself becomes the sole worker and the man but the sufferer. In this supreme moment God may "send out a beam of ghostly light, piercing this cloud of unknowing that is between thee and him"; but little can be said of a work which belongs to God alone, and our author will not take upon him to speak of it with his "blabbering fleshly tongue".

From what has been said already it is clear that an important part of the disciple's effort, and a condition of its success, is a negative process, a progressive abstraction from sense and sensible things, and from discursive thought, until his activity may be described as a "loving stirring and a blind beholding". The author recognizes that this is a difficult exercise, and he does not suppose that all are fitted for it, or that many will reach it without long preparation. In the eighth chapter, and again in the twenty-first, he is at pains to expound the doctrine of the two lives: active and contemplative. To each of these he gives two parts, a lower and a higher; but the higher part of active life being the same as the lower part of contemplative life, we get no more than three degrees, which we may call active, mixed, and contemplative. In the first a man is occupied with the corporal works of mercy and charity; in the second he practises discursive prayer—i.e., mental prayer—with meditation on such subjects as sin, the life of Christ, the attributes of God; in the third he puts aside all busy activity both of body and mind, and endeavouring to contemplate God in his pure Being, reaches out to him with an effort of will.

These three degrees represent a progressive series, but they are not to be regarded as cut off, one from another, by hard-and-fast division, for even a man who "stands in activity by outward form of living" may, at least intermittently, attain the highest point of the contemplative act. However, the degrees naturally lie in a progressive series, one beyond the other. If we conceive them so, then the

first advance to contemplation is made when a soul takes up the practice of mental prayer, and it is pronounced by our author impossible for a soul to come to contemplation without "many such sweet meditations beforehand of his own wretchedness, the passion, the kindness, the great goodness, and the worthiness of God"; impossible, unless by special and rare grace. These meditations are good and necessary in their place, but when a man is called by God to the work of this book all is to be forgotten but God alone; for the higher part of contemplative life "hangeth wholly in this darkness and in this cloud of unknowing, with a loving stirring and a blind beholding of the naked Being of God himself only". So that a soul must then leave such meditations, seem they never so holy, and "put them and hold them far down under the cloud of forgetting, if he is ever to pierce the cloud of unknowing between him and his God".

The passage from the intermediate stage to the contemplative life is not to be made but at the call of God. Our Lord gives a general invitation in the Gospel, where he bids us be perfect as he himself is perfect; but there is a more special call than this. The individual soul will know whether he is called by two tokens in particular: if he has cleansed his soul from all sin, if he feels a constant attraction to this work and a delight in hearing of it. He must be a man who has genuinely given up the world. He must take counsel of his spiritual adviser, and set himself meekly to the work. He should call on the help of our Lord: "In the love of Jesus there shall be thy help . . . knit thee therefore to him by love and by belief, and then by virtue of that knot thou shalt be common partaker with him, and with all that by love be so knitted to him." Our Lord will surely answer his prayer, and he has a special love towards sinners who are truly converted and take up this work, helping and championing them as he did St Mary Magdalen. When he has purified his soul from sin, then must he begin the work of abstraction, the *cloud of forgetting*. Here he will have great difficulty at first, especially as his mind will very plausibly urge that meditation on the passion of Christ or on the attributes of God is very good and profitable for his soul. It *is* good, but not now. Let St Mary Magdalen be his example, who, when she sat at our Lord's feet, did not regard "the preciousness of his blessed body, or the sweet voice and words of his Manhood . . . but the sovereignest wisdom of his Godhead lapped in the

dark words of his Manhood". Let him mean God that "made him, bought him, called him"—i.e., his Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. And he may simplify this yet further to the thought of God in his pure Being without all relation. From the contemplative is asked continually the declaration of St Peter: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"; his gaze must ever be directed to the divinity, and his act of love is better the more simply and perfectly it is fixed upon this object. For the mind is then simplified to a point, and the will pours itself out in acts of love, acts which need no expression in words, and, indeed, can hardly be expressed. And yet some souls will use words, and they may be such as these: "Good Jesu! Fair Jesu! Sweet Jesu!"; while all the time the will beats upon that cloud of unknowing which prevents perfect knowledge, but yet is in some way pierced by the "sharp dart of longing love". And that piercing, wherein love attains what is forbidden to knowledge, is the consummation of the contemplative life so far as it depends upon our grace-helped efforts.

There is little more to be said about the teaching of the *Cloud*. The author, in this as in his other works, has one point and no more, and to this he keeps. All else in the book is concerned with its main work, either as specifying the conditions for its proper exercise, or enumerating the dangers and delusions that beset it, or telling of its effects. Among these last we may note that he claims for this high life of contemplation a great social efficacy, and a more perfect charity than is contained in the busy activity of others. The silent effort of the contemplative prevails with God, for the welfare of living and dead, beyond all other prayer or activity. And, at the height of his working, he becomes in a wonderful way likened to our Lord in his redemptive work. The perfect disciple is crucified in spirit, as his Lord was bodily on the cross, and offers himself for all his brethren and sisters in nature; and not only for his friends and his kindred, but generally for all mankind. This work also is the most effective way of destroying sin, which it does to the very root; and it gains all virtues without any special effort after any one virtue in particular. *Venerunt mihi omnia pariter cum illa*. Its effects will manifest themselves in the outward behaviour of the contemplative, which will be such that all men will desire to have him for their friend. Meanwhile his life is a single-minded striving after the "one

thing necessary", in which he leaves aside the created, the temporary, the provisional, "picking off the rough bark and feeding himself on the sweet kernel", aiming always at the centre and core of all being. And he shall lack for nothing: God will give him sufficiency or patience, patience or sufficiency. And ever he will possess a substantial joy, which is the beginning of the life of heaven; for he will possess "God, in whom is all plenty; and whoso hath him —yea, as this book telleth—he needeth nought else in this life."

CONTENTS

PAGE

PREFACE v

INTRODUCTION vii

I. A BOOK OF CONTEMPLATION, THE WHICH IS CALLED THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING, IN THE WHICH A SOUL IS ONED WITH GOD

The Prologue 3

CHAPTER

1. Of four degrees of Christian men's living; and of the course of his calling that this book was made unto 5
2. A short stirring to meekness and to the work of this book 6
3. How the work of this book shall be wrought, and of the worthiness of it before all other works 7
4. Of the shortness of this work, and how it may not be come to by the curiosity of wit, nor by imagination 8
5. That in the time of this work all the creatures that ever have been, be now, or ever shall be, and all the works of those same creatures, should be hid under the cloud of forgetting 13
6. A short conceit of the work of this book, treated by question 14
7. How a man shall bear himself in this work against all thoughts, and especially against all those that arise from his own curiosity of learning and of natural wit 15
8. A good declaring of certain doubts that may fall in this work, treated by question: in destroying of a man's own curiosity of learning and of natural wit; and in distinguishing of the degrees and the parts of active and contemplative living 17
9. That, in the time of this work, the thought of the holiest creature that ever God made hindereth more than it profiteth 20

CHAPTER PAGE

10. How a man shall know when his thought is no sin; and, if it be sin, when it is deadly and when it is venial 22
11. That a man should weigh each thought and each stirring after that it is, and always eschew recklessness in venial sin 23
12. That by virtue of this work not only is sin destroyed, but also virtues be gotten 24
13. What meekness is in itself, and when it is perfect and when it is imperfect 25
14. That without imperfect meekness coming before, it is impossible for a sinner to come to the perfect virtue of meekness in this life 26
15. A short proof against their error that say that there is no perfecter cause to be meeked under than is the thought of a man's own wretchedness 28
16. That by virtue of this work a sinner truly turned and called to contemplation cometh sooner to perfection than by any other work; and by it soonest may get of God forgiveness of sins 29
17. That a true contemplative will not meddle with active life, nor with anything that is done or spoken about him, nor yet answer his blamers in excusing of himself 31
18. How that yet unto this day all actives complain of contemplatives, as Martha did of Mary; of the which complaining ignorance is the cause 32
19. A short excusation of him that made this book, teaching how all contemplatives should hold all actives fully excused of their complaining words and deeds 33
20. How Almighty God will ghostly answer for all those that for the excusing of themselves will not leave their business about the love of him 34
21. The true exposition of this Gospel word: *Mary hath chosen the best part* 35
22. Of the wonderful love that Christ had to Mary, in

CHAPTER PAGE

person of all sinners truly turned and called to the grace of contemplation 37

23. How God will answer and provide for them in spirit, that for business about his love will not answer or provide for themselves 38

24. What charity is in itself, and how it is subtly and perfectly contained in the work of this book 39

25. That in the time of this work a perfect soul hath no special regard to any one man in this life 41

26. That without full special grace, or long use in common grace, the work of this book is right travailous; and in this work, which is the work of the soul helped by grace, and which is the work of only God 42

27. Who should work in the gracious work of this book 43

28. That a man should not presume to work in this work before the time that he be lawfully cleansed in conscience of all his special deeds of sin 44

29. That a man should bidingly travail in this work, and suffer the pain thereof, and judge no man 44

30. Who should blame and condemn other men's faults 45

31. How a man should behave in the beginning of this work against all thoughts and stirrings of sin 46

32. Of two ghostly devices that be helpful to a ghostly beginner in the work of this book 46

33. That in this work a soul is cleansed both of his special sins and of the pain of them, and yet how there is no perfect rest in this life 47

34. That God giveth this grace freely without any means, and that it may not be come to with means 48

35. Of three means in the which a contemplative prentice should be occupied: reading, thinking, and praying 50

36. Of the meditations of them that continually travail in the work of this book 52

37. Of the special prayers of them that be continual workers in the work of this book 53

38. How and why short prayer pierceth heaven 54

39. How a perfect worker shall pray, and what prayer is

CHAPTER PAGE

in itself; and if a man shall pray in words, which words are most suited to the property of prayer 55

40. That in the time of this work a soul hath no special regard to any one vice in itself nor to any one virtue in itself 56

41. That in all other works beneath this, men should keep discretion; but in this none 57

42. That by indiscretion in this work, men shall keep discretion in all other things; and surely else never 58

43. That all knowing and feeling of a man's own being must needs be lost, if the perfection of this work shall verily be felt in any soul in this life 59

44. How a soul shall dispose itself on its own part, so as to destroy all knowing and feeling of its own being 60

45. A good declaring of some certain deceits that may befall in this work 62

46. A good teaching how a man shall flee these deceits, and work more with a listiness of spirit than with any boisterousness of body 63

47. A subtle teaching of this work in purity of spirit; declaring how a soul should show his desire on one manner unto God, and on the contrary unto man 64

48. How God will be served both with body and with soul, and reward men in both; and how men shall know when all those sounds and sweetnesses that happen to the body in time of prayer be both good and evil 66

49. That the substance of all perfection is nought else but a good will; and how that all sounds and comforts and sweetnesses that may befall in this life be to it but as it were accidents 67

50. Which is chaste love; and how in some creatures such sensible comforts be but seldom, and in some right oft 68

51. That men should have great wariness so that they understand not bodily a thing that is meant ghostly; and in particular it is good to be wary in

CHAPTER PAGE

understanding of this word *in* and of this word *up* 69

52. How these young presumptuous disciples misunderstand this word *in*; and of the deceits that follow thereon 70

53. Of divers unseemly gestures that follow them that lack the work of this book 71

54. How that by virtue of this work a man is governed full wisely and made full seemly, as well in body as in soul 73

55. How they be deceived that follow the fervour of spirit in condemning of sin without discretion 75

56. How they be deceived that lean more to the curiosity of natural wit, and of learning got in the school of men, than to the common doctrine and counsel of Holy Church 76

57. How these young presumptuous disciples misunderstand this other word *up*; and of the deceits that follow thereon 77

58. That a man shall not take ensample of Saint Martin and of Saint Stephen, for to strain his imagination bodily upwards in the time of his prayer 78

59. That a man shall not take ensample from the bodily ascension of Christ, for to strain his imagination upwards bodily in the time of prayer; and that time, place, and body, these three, should be forgotten in all ghostly working 81

60. That the high and the nearest way to heaven is run by desires, and not by paces of feet 82

61. That, by the course of nature, all bodily thing is subject unto ghostly thing and ruled thereafter, and not contrariwise 83

62. How a man may know when his ghostly work is beneath him or without him, and when it is even with him or within him, and when it is above him and under his God 84

63. Of the powers of a soul in general, and how mind in special is a principal power, comprehending in

CHAPTER PAGE

itself all the other powers and all those things in the which they work 85

64. Of the other two principal powers, reason and will; and of the works of them, before sin and after 86

65. Of the first secondary power—that is to say, imagination; and of the works and of the obedience of it unto reason, before sin and after 87

66. Of the other secondary power—that is to say, sensuality; and of the works and of the obedience of it unto will, before sin and after 88

67. That whoso knoweth not the powers of a soul and the manner of their working may easily be deceived in understanding of ghostly words and of ghostly working; and how a soul is made a god in grace 89

68. That nowhere bodily is everywhere ghostly; and how our outer man calleth the work of this book nought 90

69. How that a man's affection is marvellously changed in the ghostly feeling of this nought, when it is nowhere wrought 91

70. That right as by the failing of our bodily wits we begin most readily to come to the knowing of ghostly things, so by the failing of our ghostly wits we begin most readily to come to the knowledge of God, such as is possible by grace to be had here 92

71. That some may not come to feel the perfection of this work but in time of ravishing, and some may have it when they will, in the common state of man's soul 94

72. That one worker in this work should not judge nor think of another worker as he feeleth in himself 95

73. How that after the likeness of Moses, Beseleel, and Aaron, in their dealings with the Ark of the Testament, we profit on three manners in this grace of contemplation; for this grace is figured in that ark 96

74. How that the matter of this book is never read or

CHAPTER PAGE

spoken, nor heard read or spoken, by a soul disposed thereto, without the feeling of a very accordance to the effect of the same work; and a rehearsing of the same charge that is written in the Prologue 97

75. Of some certain tokens by the which a man may prove whether he be called by God to work in this work 98

II. THE EPISTLE OF PRIVY COUNSEL

The Prologue 103

CHAPTER

1. That this work is a striving towards God, wherein a man offers himself to God, being to being, without curious seeking in the qualities of his being or of God's 103

2. After what manner a man should offer his being to God; and, in particular, that he should cease from busy meditations 106

3. That this work is enjoined by Scripture; and that in it all duties, and especially that of charity, be fully performed 107

4. That one who is in this work needeth not any particular consideration of the qualities of himself or of God 110

5. That in this work the eternal wisdom, the Word of God, descendeth into man's soul and uniteth it to himself; and of the good effects that follow 112

6. That the soul must give itself wholly to God, who will provide for it; with a warning to those that would censure this work 115

7. That this work is perfection, as witnessed by the virtues which accompany it; and that we pursue it at the call and with the grace of God 118

8. That a man must forget his own being in order to feel only the being of God; and of the pain entailed in this effort 121

9. That this work lieth not in busy meditations; and that,

CHAPTER PAGE

nevertheless, meditation upon Christ our Lord is the true and only door thereto 123

10. That a man should always follow his own call, without judging others or seeking to force God; and that this work is not ruled by human wisdom, but by the high wisdom of God through the secret inspirations of his Spirit 125

11. Of two sorts of tokens in particular by the which a man may discern the call of God to this work 128

12. Of desolation and of consolation, and why God sends them; with the conclusion about the tokens 131

13. That our Lord himself teacheth this work; and that the contemplative should persevere in humility and in love 134

III. THE TRANSLATION OF DENIS HID DIVINITY

The Prologue 139

The prayer of Saint Denis 139

CHAPTER

1. How a man shall rise in this hid divinity by doing away of all things on this side God 140

2. How we shall be oned to the cause of all, being above all 143

3. Which books be of affirming and which of denying divinity 145

4. That he is none of sensible things the which is cause of them all 147

5. That he is none of understandable things the which is cause of them all 147

IV. SECRETUM SIVE MYSTICUM, BEING AN EXPOSITION OF THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING, BY FATHER AUGUSTINE BAKER, MONK OF THE ENGLISH BENEDICTINE CONGREGATION

PART I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The Prologue 151

CHAPTER PAGE

1. Of the authorship of the book called the Cloud, and who should read it 151
2. Of other authors who have handled the same matter 155
3. That God leadeth souls by two ways, an ordinary and an extraordinary 159
4. That this book is written for contemplatives, and who should practise its teaching 161
5. Of the substance of this book 163
6. Of aspirations and the mystic union 166
7. A further discourse concerning acts and aspirations 168
8. That this work is very various, yet hath certain fixed characters 172
9. Of the case of desolation, and of a certain subtle working 175
10. Of the abstraction proper to this work 178
11. The conclusion of this introduction 183

PART II. COMMENTARY ON THE CLOUD CHAPTER BY CHAPTER 184

POSTSCRIPT

Of that mystic saying: "Nothing and nothing make nothing." 217

INDEX OF NAMES 219

I. HERE BEGINNETH A BOOK OF CONTEMPLATION, THE WHICH IS CALLED THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING, IN THE WHICH A SOUL IS ONED WITH GOD

THE PRAYER ON THE PROLOGUE

God, unto whom all hearts be open, and unto whom all will speaketh, and unto whom no privy thing is hid: I beseech thee so for to cleanse the intent of mine heart with the unspeakable gift of thy grace, that I may perfectly love thee and worthily praise thee. Amen.

*

Deus, cui omne cor patet, et omnis voluntas loquitur, et quem nullum latet secretum: purifica per infusionem Sancti Spiritus cogitationes cordis nostri, ut te perfecte diligere et digne laudare mereamur (Collect of the Mass *Ad postulandam gratiam Spiritus Sancti*).

HERE BEGINNETH THE PROLOGUE

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.

I charge thee and I beseech thee, with as much power and virtue as the bond of charity is sufficient to suffer, whatsoever thou be that this book shalt have in possession, whether by property, or by keeping, or by bearing as a messenger, or else by borrowing, that inasmuch as in thee is by will and advisement,[1] thou neither read it, write it, nor speak it, nor yet suffer it to be read, written, or spoken, by any other or to any other, unless it be by such a one or to such a one as hath (in thy supposing) in a true will and by a whole intent purposed him to be a perfect follower of Christ. And that not only in active living, but also in the sovereignest point of contemplative living the which is possible by grace to be come to in this present life by a perfect soul yet abiding in this deadly[2] body. And he should be such a one as doth all that in him is, and (in thy supposing) hath done long time before, for to able him to contemplative living, by the virtuous means of active living. For else it accordeth nothing to him.

And over this I charge thee and I beseech thee, by the authority of charity, if any such shall read it, write it, or speak it, or else hear it read or spoken, that thou charge them, as I do thee, for to take them

[1] Deliberation. [2] Mortal.

time to read it, speak it, write it, or hear it, all over. For peradventure there is some matter therein, in the beginning or in the middle, the which is hanging and not fully declared where it standeth; and if it be not there, it is soon after, or else in the end. Wherefore, if a man saw one matter and not another, peradventure he might lightly be led into error. And therefore, for eschewing of this error both in thyself and in all other, I pray thee for charity do as I tell thee.

But as for worldly praters, open praisers and blamers of themselves or of any other, gossips, whisperers, tale-bearers and all manner of carpers: cared I never that they saw this book. For mine intent was never to write such thing unto them. And therefore I would that they meddled not therewith; neither they nor any of these curious learned or unlearned men. Yea, though they be full good men in active living, yet this matter accordeth nothing to them. But not so to those men, the which although they stand in activity by outward form of living, nevertheless yet by inward stirring under the privy spirit of God—whose dooms be hid—be full graciously disposed: not continually, as is proper to true contemplatives, but now and then, to be partakers in the highest point of this contemplative act. If such men might see it, they should by the grace of God be greatly comforted thereby.

This book is distinguished in seventy chapters and five. Of the which chapters the last chapter of all teacheth some certain tokens by the which a soul may verily prove whether he be called by God to be a worker in this work or none.[1]

[1] The Ampleforth MS. begins with the words of 1 Peter v. 6: "Be ye humbled under the mighty hand of God." The book is described on the title page as: "A brief treatise called the Cloud, in which are contained many high points of Divine Contemplation, gathered by the Author thereof out of the works of St Dionysius Areopagita." And the text is introduced with: "Here beginneth the prologue of this Book which is called the Divine Cloud of Unknowing." The same title (*Divine* Cloud) occurs in some MSS. of the fifteenth century, and it was under this title that the book was first printed.

A BRIEF ADDRESS TO HIM THAT THIS BOOK WAS MADE UNTO

GHOSTLY friend in God, I pray thee and I beseech thee that thou have a busy beholding to the course and the manner of thy calling. And thank God heartily, so that thou mayest through the help of his grace stand stiffly in the state and the degree and in the form of living that thou hast deliberately purposed, against all the subtle assaults of thy bodily and ghostly enemies, and win to the crown of life that ever lasteth. Amen.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

Of four degrees of Christian men's living; and of the course of his calling that this book was made unto

GHOSTLY friend in God, thou shalt well understand that I find, in my boisterous beholding,[1] four degrees and forms of Christian men's living, and they be these: *Common*, *Special*, *Singular*, and *Perfect*. Three of these may be begun and ended in this life; and the fourth may by grace be begun here, but it shall ever last without end in the bliss of heaven. And right as thou seest how they be set here in order, each after other, first *Common*, then *Special*, after *Singular*, and last *Perfect*: right so me thinketh that in the same order and in the same course hath our Lord of his great mercy called thee and led thee unto him by the desire of thine heart.

For first thou knowest well, that when thou wert living in the *common* degree of Christian men's living in company of thy worldly friends, it seemeth to me that the everlasting love of his Godhead through the which he made thee and wrought thee when thou wert nought, and then bought thee with the price of his precious blood when thou wert lost in Adam, might not suffer thee to be so far from him in form and degree of living. And therefore he kindled thy desire full graciously, and fastened by it a leash of longing, and led thee by it into a more *special* state and form of living, to be a

[1] According to my rough, unskilled reflection.

servant of the special servants of his; where thou mightest learn to live more specially and more ghostly in his service than thou didst, or mightest do, in the common degree of living before.

And what more? Yet it seemeth that he would not leave thee thus lightly, for the love of his heart, the which he hath evermore had unto thee since thou wert aught. But what did he? Seest thou not how sweetly and how graciously he hath privily pulled thee to the third degree and manner of living, the which is called *singular*? In the which solitary form and manner of living thou mayest learn to lift up the foot of thy love, and to step towards the state and degree of living that is *perfect*, and the last state of all.[1]

THE SECOND CHAPTER

A short stirring to meekness and to the work of this book

Look up now, thou weak wretch, and see what thou art. What art thou, and what hast thou deserved, thus to be called by our Lord? What weary wretched heart and sleeping in sloth is that, the which is not wakened with the drawing of this love and the voice of this calling? Beware now, wretch, in this while of thine enemy; and hold thyself never the holier nor the better, for the worthiness of this calling and for the singular form of living that thou art in; but the more wretched and cursed, unless thou do that in thee is goodly, by grace and by counsel,[2] to live according to thy calling. And insomuch thou shouldst be more meek and loving to thy ghostly Spouse, in that he, that is the Almighty God, King of kings and Lord of lords, would meek himself so low unto thee, and, among all

[1] The disciple, to whom the *Cloud* is ostensibly addressed, is a young man of twenty-four (Chap. 4), who is elsewhere represented as no scholar. From the present chapter we could add that he had been a lay brother in a monastery, but had passed from that to the singular vocation of an anchorite. A passage in Chap. 23 represents him as dependent for his sustenance on casual charity. We should, however, allow for the possibility that the disciple is no more than a literary convention, as commonly employed by spiritual writers.

[2] This word in our author's use means generally either the advice of a confessor, or the confessor or director himself.

the flock of his sheep, so graciously would choose thee to be one of his specials, and then set thee in the place of pasture, where thou mayest be fed with the sweetness of his love, in earnest of thine heritage the kingdom of heaven.

Do on then fast, I pray thee. Look now forwards and let the backwards be. And see what thou lackest and not what thou hast; for that is the readiest getting and keeping of meekness. All thy life now must always stand in desire, if thou shalt advance in degree of perfection. This desire must always be wrought in thy will, by the hand of Almighty God and thy consent. But one thing I tell thee: he is a jealous lover and suffereth no fellowship, and he liketh not to work in thy will unless he be only with thee by himself.[1] He asketh no help but only thyself. He wills thou do but look upon him and let him alone. And keep thou the windows and the door from flies and enemies assailing. And if thou be willing to do this, thou needest but meekly to set upon him with prayer, and soon will he help thee.[2] Set on then: let me see how thou bearest thee. He is full ready, and doth but abide thee. But what shalt thou do, and how shalt thou set on?

THE THIRD CHAPTER

How the work of this book shall be wrought, and of the worthiness of it before all other works

Lift up thine heart unto God with a meek stirring of love; and mean himself and none of his goods. And thereto look that thou loathe to think on aught but himself, so that nought work in thy mind nor in thy will but only himself. And do that in thee is to forget all the creatures that ever God made and the works of them,

[1] Cf. *Scimus autem quia singularis amor consortem non recipit.* Richard of St Victor, *Benjamin Major*, iv, c. 15. P.L., cxcvi. 152.

[2] "Set" is a substitution for "put", the reading of the MSS. The Latin version of this passage is: *Quod si benevolus feceris, tantum tibi opus est ut ei innuas vel imponas oratione tua quid volueris et sine dubio te citissime adjuvabit. Deduc igitur ad effectum quae praecipio; videam quam bene feceris debere tuum; nam ipse semper paratus est, tantummodo te exspectans. Sed quid facies et quomodo facies? Attende, rogo, et tibi in sequentibus demonstrabo.*

so that thy thought or thy desire be not directed or stretched to any of them, neither in general nor in special. But let them be, and take no heed of them.

This is the work of the soul that most pleaseth God. All saints and angels have joy of this work and hasten them to help it with all their might. All fiends be mad when thou dost thus, and try for to defeat it in all that they can. All men living on earth be wonderfully helped by this work, thou knowest not how. Yea, the souls in purgatory are eased of their pains by virtue of this work. Thou thyself art cleansed and made virtuous by no work so much. And yet it is the lightest work of all, when a soul is helped with grace in sensible list;[1] and soonest done. But else it is hard and wonderful for thee to do.

Cease not, therefore, but travail therein till thou feel list. For at the first time when thou dost it, thou findest but a darkness, and as it were a *cloud of unknowing*, thou knowest not what, saving that thou feelest in thy will a naked intent unto God. This darkness and this cloud, howsoever thou dost, is betwixt thee and thy God, and hindereth thee, so that thou mayest neither see him clearly by light of understanding in thy reason, nor feel him in sweetness of love in thine affection. And therefore shape thee to bide in this darkness as long as thou mayest, evermore crying after him whom thou lovest. For if ever thou shalt see him or feel him, as it may be here, it must always be in this cloud and in this darkness. And if thou wilt busily travail as I bid thee, I trust in his mercy that thou shalt come thereto.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

Of the shortness of this work, and how it may not be come to by the curiosity of wit, nor by imagination

But for this, that thou shalt not err in this working, and ween that it be otherwise than it is, I shall tell thee a little more thereof, as me thinketh.

[1] Latin version: *Quando anima adjuvatur gratia in sensibili delectatione.* "List" is akin to "lust", and means rather more than delight; it implies also zest and desire.

This work asketh no long time ere it be once truly done, as some men ween; for it is the shortest work of all that man may imagine. It is neither longer nor shorter than is an atom; the which atom, by the definition of true philosophers in the science of astronomy, is the least part of time.[1] And it is so little that, for the littleness of it, it is indivisible and nearly incomprehensible. This is that time of the which it is written: *All the time that is given to thee, it shall be asked of thee how thou hast spent it.* And a right thing it is that thou shouldst give account of it. For it is neither longer nor shorter, but exactly equal to one single stirring that is within in the principal working power of thy soul, the which is thy will. For even so many willings or desirings—no more nor no fewer—may be and are in one hour in thy will, as are atoms in one hour. And if thou were reformed by grace to the first state of man's soul, as it was before sin, then shouldst thou evermore by help of that grace be lord of that stirring or of those stirrings; so that none should go amiss, but all should stretch unto the sovereign desirable, and unto the highest willable thing, the which is God.

For he is even meet to our soul by measuring of his Godhead;[2] and our soul is even meet unto him by the worthiness of our creation to his image and likeness. And he by himself without more, and none but he, is sufficient to the full, and much more, to fulfil the will and the desire of our soul. And our soul, by virtue of this reforming grace, is made sufficient to the full to comprehend all him by love, the which is incomprehensible to all created knowing powers, as is angel or man's soul. He is incomprehensible, I mean, by their knowing and not by their loving. And therefore I call them in this case knowing powers.

But since all reasonable creatures, angel and man, have in them,

[1] A Latin note in Cambridge University MS. Kk. vi. 26 gives the following subdivisions of an hour: A point is the fourth part of an hour; a moment is the tenth part of a point; an ounce is the twelfth part of a moment; and an atom is the forty-seventh part of an ounce. So that in one hour there are 4 points, 40 moments, 480 ounces, and 22,560 atoms.

[2] He condescends to the soul, adapting his Godhead to its reach. The reference may be to the Incarnation, or generally to God's dealings with the individual soul. The Latin is: *Ipse aeque animabus nostris aptus est per suae deitatis mensurationem*, a very literal translation.

each one by himself, one principal working power, the which is called a knowing power, and another principal working power, the which is called a loving power. Of the which two powers, to the first, the which is a knowing power, God who is the maker of them is evermore incomprehensible; but to the second, the which is the loving power, he is, in every man diversely, all comprehensible to the full. Insomuch, that one loving soul alone in itself, by virtue of love, may comprehend in itself him who is sufficient to the full—and much more, without comparison—to fill all the souls and angels that ever may be. And this is the endless marvellous miracle of love, the working of which shall never have end; for ever shall he do it, and never shall he cease for to do it. See, whoso by grace see may; for the feeling of this is endless bliss, and the contrary is endless pain.

And therefore whoso were reformed by grace thus to continue in heeding all the stirrings of his will, should never be in this life—as he may not be without these stirrings in nature—without some taste of the endless sweetness; nor in the bliss of heaven without the full food. And therefore have no wonder that I stir thee to this work. For this is the work, as thou shalt hear afterward, in the which man should have continued if he never had sinned. And to this working was man made, and all things for man, to help him and further him thereto. And by this working shall man be repaired again. And for want of this working a man falleth evermore deeper and deeper into sin, and further and further from God. And by heeding and continual working in this work alone, without more, a man riseth evermore higher and higher from sin, and nearer and nearer unto God.

And therefore take good heed unto time, how thou spendest it; for nothing is more precious than time. In one little time, as little as it is, may heaven be won and lost. A token it is that time is precious: for God, that is giver of time, giveth never two times together, but each one after other. And this he doth because he would not reverse the order or the appointed course in the causes of his creation. For time is made for man, and not man for time. And therefore God, who is the ruler of nature, would not in his giving of time go before the stirring of nature in man's soul; the which stirring is even according to one time only. So that man shall have no excuse against God in the Doom, and at the giving account of the spending of time,

saying thus: "Thou givest two times at once, and I have but one stirring at once."

But sorrowfully thou sayest now: "How shall I do? And if it be true what thou sayest, how shall I give account of each time severally; I that unto this day, being now four-and-twenty years of age, have never taken heed of time? If I would now amend it, thou knowest well, by very reason of thy words written before, how it may not be according to the course of nature or of common grace, that I should be able to heed any more times, or make satisfaction for any more, than for those that be to come. Yea, and moreover well I know by very experience, that of those that be to come I shall in no wise, for abundance of frailty and slowness of spirit, be able to heed one in a hundred. So that I am verily confounded by these reasons. Help me now, for the love of Jesu!"

Right well hast thou said "for the love of Jesu". For in the love of Jesu there shall be thine help. Love is such a power that it maketh all things to be shared. Therefore love Jesu, and all thing that he hath it is thine. He by his Godhead is maker and giver of time. He by his Manhood is the true heeder of time. And he, by his Godhead and his Manhood together, is the truest judge and the asker of account of the spending of time. Knit thee therefore to him, by love and by belief; and then by virtue of that knot thou shalt be common partaker with him and with all that by love so be knitted unto him; that is to say, with our Lady Saint Mary, that full was of all grace in heeding of time, with all the angels of heaven that never may lose time, and with all the saints in heaven and on earth, that by the grace of Jesus heed time full justly in virtue of love.

Lo! here lieth comfort; understand thou wisely and pick thee some profit. But of one thing I warn thee beyond all other: I cannot see who may truly claim fellowship thus with Jesu and his just Mother, his high angels and also with his saints, unless he be such a one as doth that in him is, with the help of grace, in heeding of time. So that he be seen to be of profit on his part, so little as it is, unto the fellowship; as each one of them is on his.

And therefore take heed to this work and to the marvellous manner of it within in thy soul. For if it be truly conceived, it is but a sudden stirring, and as it were unadvised, speedily springing unto God as a sparkle from the coal. And it is marvellous to number

the stirrings that may be in one hour wrought in a soul that is disposed to this work. And yet, in one stirring of all these, it may have suddenly and perfectly forgotten all created things. But fast after each stirring, through the corruption of the flesh, it falleth down again to some thought, or to some done or undone deed. But what matter? For fast after, it riseth again as suddenly as it did before.

And here may men shortly conceive the manner of this working, and clearly know that it is far from any fantasy, or any false imagination, or quaint[1] opinion; the which be caused, not by such a devout and a meek blind stirring of love, but by a proud, curious, and an imaginative wit. Such a proud, curious wit must always be borne down and stiffly trodden under foot, if this work shall truly be conceived in purity of spirit. For whoso heareth this work either read or spoken, and weeneth that it may or should be come to by travail in their wits (and therefore they sit and seek in their wits how it may be, and in this curiosity they travail their imagination peradventure against the course of nature, and they feign a manner of working the which is neither bodily nor ghostly) truly this man, whatsoever he be, is perilously deceived. Insomuch, that unless God of his great goodness show his merciful miracle and make him soon to leave work and meek him to the counsel of proved workers, he shall fall either into frenzies, or else into other great mischiefs of ghostly sins and devil's deceits; through the which he may lightly be lost, both life and soul, without any end. And therefore for God's love beware in this work, and travail not in thy wits nor in thy imagination in nowise. For I tell thee truly, it may not be come to by travail in them; and therefore leave them and work not with them.

And ween not, because I call it a darkness or a cloud, that it is any cloud congealed of the vapours that fly in the air, or any darkness such as is in thine house on nights, when thy candle is out. For such a darkness and such a cloud mayest thou imagine with curiosity of wit, for to bear before thine eyes in the lightest day of summer; and also contrariwise in the darkest night of winter thou mayest imagine a clear shining light. Let be such falsehoods; I mean not thus. For when I say darkness, I mean a lacking of knowing: as all thing that thou knowest not, or hast forgotten, is dark to thee; for thou seest it not with thy ghostly eye. And for this reason it is called, not a

[1] Clever, ingenious.

cloud of the air, but a *cloud of unknowing*; which is betwixt thee and thy God.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

That in the time of this work all the creatures that ever have been, be now, or ever shall be, and all the works of those same creatures, should be hid under the cloud of forgetting

And if ever thou shalt come to this cloud and dwell and work therein as I bid thee, thou must, as this *cloud of unknowing* is above thee, betwixt thee and thy God, right so put a *cloud of forgetting* beneath thee, betwixt thee and all the creatures that ever be made. Thou thinkest, peradventure, that thou art full far from God, because this *cloud of unknowing* is betwixt thee and thy God; but surely, if it be well conceived, thou art full further from him when thou hast no *cloud of forgetting* betwixt thee and all the creatures that ever be made. As oft as I say "all the creatures that ever be made", so oft do I mean, not only the creatures themselves, but also all the works and the conditions of the same creatures. I except not one creature, whether they be bodily creatures or ghostly; nor yet any condition or work of any creature, whether they be good or evil. But, to speak shortly, all should be hid under the *cloud of forgetting* in this case.

For although it be full profitable sometimes to think of certain conditions and deeds of some certain special creatures, nevertheless in this work it profiteth little or nought. Because mind[1] or thinking of any creature that ever God made, or of any of their deeds either, is a manner of ghostly light; for the eye of thy soul is opened on it and close fixed thereupon, as the eye of a shooter is upon the prick[2] that he shooteth to. And one thing I tell thee, that everything that thou thinkest upon is above thee for the time and betwixt thee and thy God. And insomuch thou art the further from God, that aught is in thy mind but only God.

Yea—and if it be courteous and seemly to say—in this work it

[1] Besides its present meaning, "mind" in Middle English has the sense of "remembrance", which survives in "month's mind".

[2] Mark, target.

profiteth little or nought to think of the kindness or the worthiness of God, nor on our Lady, nor on the saints or angels in heaven, nor yet on the joys of heaven: that is to say, with a special beholding[1] to them, as though thou wouldst by that beholding feed and increase thy purpose. I trow that on nowise it should be so in this case and in this work. For although it be good to think upon the kindness of God, and to love him and praise him for it: yet it is far better to think upon the naked being of him, and to love him and praise him for himself.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

A short conceit of the work of this book, treated by question

But now thou askest me and sayest: "How shall I think on himself, and what is he?" Unto this I cannot answer thee, except to say: "I know not."

For thou hast brought me with thy question into that same darkness, and into that same *cloud of unknowing*, that I would thou wert in thyself. For of all other creatures and their works—yea, and of the works of God himself—may a man through grace have fulness of knowing, and well can he think of them; but of God himself can no man think. And therefore I would leave all that thing that I can think, and choose to my love that thing that I cannot think. For why, he may well be loved, but not thought. By love may he be gotten and holden; but by thought neither. And therefore, although it be good sometime to think on the kindness and the worthiness of God in special, and although it be a light and a part of contemplation: nevertheless in this work it shall be cast down and covered with a *cloud of forgetting*. And thou shalt step above it stalwartly, but listily, with a devout and a pleasing stirring of love, and try to pierce that darkness above thee. And smite upon that thick *cloud of unknowing* with a sharp dart of longing love; and go not thence for aught that befalleth.

[1] Consideration, regard.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

How a man shall bear himself in this work against all thoughts, and especially against all those that arise from his own curiosity of learning and of natural wit

And if any thought rise and will press always above thee, betwixt thee and that darkness, and ask thee saying: "What seekest thou, and what wouldst thou have?" say thou, that it is God that thou wouldst have. "Him I covet, him I seek, and nought but him."

And if he ask thee: "What is that God?" say thou, that it is God that made thee and bought thee, and that graciously hath called thee to his love. "And in him", say, "thou hast no skill." And therefore say: "Go thou down again"; and tread him fast down with a stirring of love, although he seem to thee right holy, and seem to thee as if he would help thee to seek him. For peradventure he will bring to thy mind divers full fair and wonderful points of his kindness, and say that he is full sweet and full loving, full gracious and full merciful.[1] And if thou wilt hear him, he coveteth no better; for at the last he will thus chatter ever more and more till he bring thee lower, to the thought of his passion.

And there will he let thee see the wonderful kindness of God; and if thou listen to him, he desireth nought better. For soon after he will let thee see thine old wretched living; and peradventure, in seeing and thinking thereof, he will bring to thy mind some place that thou hast dwelt in before this time. So that at the last, ere ever thou knowest, thou shalt be scattered thou knowest not where. The cause of this scattering is: that first thou didst wilfully listen to that thought, and then thou didst answer him, receive him, and let him have his way.

And yet, nevertheless, the thing that he said was both good and holy. Yea, and so holy, that whatever man or woman weeneth to come to contemplation without many such sweet meditations beforehand of their own wretchedness, the passion, the kindness, the great goodness, and the worthiness of God, surely he shall err and

[1] Latin version: *Ac si diceret tibi: Vere ipse Jesus quem quaeris valde dulcis est et amabilis, valde gratiosus, misericors et benignus.*

fail of his purpose. And yet, a man or woman that hath long time been practised in these meditations, must nevertheless leave them, and put them and hold them far down under the *cloud of forgetting*, if ever he shall pierce the *cloud of unknowing* betwixt him and his God.

And therefore, when thou purposest thee to this work, and feelest by grace that thou art called by God, lift up thine heart unto God with a meek stirring of love. And mean God that made thee, and bought thee, and that graciously hath called thee to this work: and receive none other thought of God. And yet not all these, except thou desirest; for a naked intent directed unto God, without any other cause than himself, sufficeth wholly.

And if thou desirest to have this intent lapped and folden in one word, so that thou mayest have better hold thereupon, take thee but a little word of one syllable, for so it is better than of two; for the shorter the word, the better it accordeth with the work of the spirit. And such a word is this word GOD or this word LOVE. Choose whichever thou wilt, or another: whatever word thou likest best of one syllable. And fasten this word to thine heart, so that it may never go thence for anything that befalleth.[1]

This word shall be thy shield and thy spear, whether thou ridest in peace or in war. With this word, thou shalt beat on this cloud and this darkness above thee. With this word, thou shalt smite down all manner of thought under the *cloud of forgetting*. Insomuch, that if any thought press upon thee to ask thee what thou wouldst have, answer with no more words but with this one word.[2] And if he offer of his great learning to expound to thee that word and to tell thee the conditions of that word, say to him that thou wilt have it

[1] St Benedict, following Cassian, teaches that prayer should be "short and pure." We may find in the conferences of the Abbot Isaac (IX and X) some of the characteristic teaching of the *Cloud*, and from the same source comes the imagery of the next sentence. "Take a short verse of a psalm," says the Abbot, "and it shall be shield and buckler to you against all your foes" (X. 10). The Latin of the previous sentences is: *Ut igitur verbum istud non ignores, tale sit quale est hoc* DEUS *sive* AMOR, *aut eis consimile, quae Anglice loquendo una syllaba exprimi possunt; de quibus id assumas quod melius tibi placet.*

[2] . . . *Non multis in verbis sed paucis, immo uno tantum verbo respondeas atque dicas: "Amorem."*

all whole, and not broken or undone.[1] And if thou wilt hold fast to this purpose, be thou sure that that thought will no while bide. And why? Surely because thou wilt not let him feed himself on such sweet meditations of God touched before.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

A good declaring of certain doubts that may fall in this work, treated by question: in destroying of a man's own curiosity of learning and of natural wit; and in distinguishing of the degrees and the parts of active and contemplative living

But now thou askest me: "What is he that thus presseth upon me in this work? Is it a good thing or an evil? And if it be an evil thing, then have I marvel (thou sayest) why that he will increase a man's devotion so much. For sometimes methinks it is surpassing comfort to listen to his tales. For he will sometime, methinks, make me weep full heartily for pity of the passion of Christ, sometime for my wretchedness, and for many other reasons that, methinks, be full holy and do me much good. And therefore, methinks that he should in nowise be evil; and if he be good, and with his sweet tales doth me so much good, then have I great marvel why thou biddest me put him down and away so far under the *cloud of forgetting*."

Now surely, methinks that this is a well moved question, and therefore I think to answer thereto so feebly as I can. First, when thou askest me what is he that presseth so fast on thee in this work, offering to help thee: I say that it is a sharp and a clear beholding[2] of thy natural wit, printed in thy reason within in thy soul. And where thou askest me whether it be good or evil: I say that it must always be good in its nature; for it is a beam of the likeness of God. But the use thereof may be both good and evil. Good, when it is opened by grace so as to see thy wretchedness, the passion, the kindness, and the wonderful works of God in his creatures, bodily and ghostly. And then it is no wonder though it increase thy devotion full much, as thou sayest. But then is the use evil, when it is

[1] *Nolo ut mihi illud exponas vel declares; volo enim habere integrum illud et non divisum, nec in partes per tuam expositionem aliqualiter disgregatum.*

[2] Consideration, thought.

swollen with pride and with curiosity of much learning and letterly knowledge, as in clerks, and maketh them press for to be holden, not meek scholars and masters of divinity or of devotion, but proud scholars of the devil and masters of vanity and of falsehood. And in other men or women, whether they be religious or seculars, the use and the working of this natural wit is then evil, when it is swollen with proud and curious skills of worldly things and fleshly conceits: in coveting of worldly dignities and having of riches and vain delights and flatterings of others.

And where that thou askest me, why thou shalt put it down under the *cloud of forgetting*, since it so is that it is good in its nature, and, moreover, when it is used well, doth thee so much good and increaseth thy devotion so much: to this I answer and say, that thou shalt well understand that there be two manner of lives in Holy Church. The one is active life, and the other is contemplative life. Active is the lower, and contemplative is the higher. Active life hath two degrees, a higher and a lower; and also contemplative life hath two degrees, a lower and a higher. These two lives be so coupled together, that although they differ in part, yet neither of them may be had fully without some part of the other. Because that part that is the higher part of active life, that same part is the lower part of contemplative life. So that a man may not be fully active, except he be in part contemplative; nor yet fully contemplative (as it may be here), except he be in part active. The condition of active life is such, that it is both begun and ended in this life; but not so of contemplative life. For it is begun in this life, and shall last without end. Because that part that Mary chose *shall never be taken away*. Active life is *troubled and travailed about many things*; but contemplative *sitteth in peace with one thing*.[1]

The lower part of active life standeth in good and honest bodily works of mercy and of charity. The higher part of active life and the lower part of contemplative life lieth in good ghostly meditations, and busy beholding unto a man's own wretchedness with sorrow and contrition, unto the passion of Christ and of his servants with pity and compassion, and unto the wonderful gifts, kindness, and

[1] The author here follows the traditional teaching as fixed by St Augustine and St Gregory. Their doctine as to the two lives may be found set forth clearly in Abbot Butler's *Western Mysticism*.

works of God in all his creatures, bodily and ghostly, with thanking and praising. But the higher part of contemplation (as it may be had here) hangeth all wholly in this darkness and in this *cloud of unknowing*, with a loving stirring and a blind beholding unto the naked being of God himself only.

In the lower part of active life a man is without himself and beneath himself. In the higher part of active life and the lower part of contemplative life, a man is within himself and even with himself. But in the higher part of contemplative life, a man is above himself and under his God.[1] Above himself he is: because he purposeth to win thither by grace, whither he may not come by nature. That is to say, to be knit to God in spirit and in onehead of love and accordance of will. And right as it is impossible (to man's understanding) for a man to come to the higher part of active life, except he cease for a time from the lower part; so it is impossible that a man shall come to the higher part of contemplative life, except he cease for a time from the lower part. And just as it is an unlawful thing, and would hinder a man that sat in his meditations, were he then to consider his outward bodily works, the which he had done or else should do, although they were never so holy works in themselves: surely it is as unlawful a thing, and would as much hinder a man that should work in this darkness and in this *cloud of unknowing* with an affectuous stirring of love to God for himself, were he to let any thought or any meditation of God's wonderful gifts, kindness, and works in any of his creatures, bodily or ghostly, rise upon him to press betwixt him and his God; although they be never so holy thoughts, nor so pleasing, nor so comfortable.

And for this reason it is that I bid thee put down such a sharp subtle thought, and cover him with a thick *cloud of forgetting*, be he never so holy and promise he never so well to help thee in thy purpose. For why, love may reach to God in this life, but not

[1] *Cf.* St Bonaventure, *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, cap. v: *Quoniam autem contingit contemplari Deum non solum extra nos et intra nos, verum etiam supra nos: extra per vestigium, intra per imaginem et supra per lumen* (Quaracchi ed., vol. v, p. 308). But the author perhaps follows directly the *Benjamin Minor* of Richard of St Victor (cap. 55): *Extra nos corporalia, intra nos spiritualia, supra nos divina*. St Bonaventure in his mystical teaching is a disciple of Richard.

knowing. And all the while that the soul dwelleth in this deadly body, evermore is the sharpness of our understanding in beholding of all ghostly things, but most specially of God, mingled with some manner of fantasy; for the which reason our work should be unclean, and unless more wonder were, it should lead us into much error.[1]

THE NINTH CHAPTER

That, in the time of this work, the thought of the holiest creature that ever God made hindereth more than it profiteth

And therefore the sharp stirring of thine understanding, that will always press upon thee when thou settest thee to this blind work, must always be borne down; and unless thou bear him down, he will bear thee down. Insomuch that when thou weenest best to abide in this darkness, and that nought is in thy mind but only God, if thou look wisely thou shalt find thy mind not occupied in this darkness, but in a clear beholding of some thing beneath God. And if it thus be, surely then is that thing above thee for the time, and betwixt thee and thy God. And therefore purpose thee to put down such clear beholdings, be they never so holy nor so liking. For one thing I tell thee: it is more profitable to the health of thy soul, more worthy in itself, and more pleasing to God and to all the saints and angels in heaven—yea! and more helpful to all thy friends, bodily and ghostly, quick and dead—such a blind stirring of love unto God

[1] The Latin has: *Quia amor in hac vita ad Deum pertingere potest, quod humanus intellectus seu cognitio non valebit;* teaching common to the Victorines, to St Bernard and St Bonaventure. St Thomas Aquinas endorses it, but without the same bias against the intellect, in his teaching concerning "charity". The clause "unless more wonder were" is rendered *nisi divina nos clementia promptius adjuvaret*. The strength and weakness of the sixteenth-century recension come out in its version of this eloquent passage: "For love may reach to God in this life, but knowledge never. And so long as the soul dwelleth in this mortal body, the sharpness of our understanding in beholding of all spiritual things, and especially of God, hath evermore some mixture of some earthly fantasy, by reason whereof our works should be unclean, and (but for the grace of God) it would lead us into a number of errors."

for himself, and such a secret setting upon this *cloud of unknowing*; and thou wert better to have it and to feel it in thine affection ghostly, than to have the eye of thy soul opened in contemplation or beholding of all the angels or saints in heaven, or in hearing of all the mirth and melody that is among them in bliss.

And look that thou have no wonder at this; for mightest thou once see it (as clearly as thou mayest by grace), so as to grope[1] it and feel it in this life, thou wouldst think as I say. But be thou sure that clear sight shall never man have here in this life; but the feeling may men have through grace, when God vouchsafeth.[2] And therefore lift up thy love to that cloud. Or rather (if I shall say thee sooth) let God draw thy love up to that cloud; and strive thou through help of his grace to forget all other things.

For since a naked thought of anything under God, pressing against thy will and thy witting, putteth thee further from God than thou shouldst be if it were not, and hindereth thee, and maketh thee insomuch more unable to feel in experience the fruit of his love: how much, trowest thou, will a thought wittingly and wilfully drawn upon thee hinder thee in thy purpose? And since the thought of any special saint or of any clean ghostly thing will hinder thee so much, how much, trowest thou, will the thought of any man living in this wretched life, or of any bodily or worldly thing, hinder thee and let thee in this work?

I say not that such a naked sudden thought of any good and clean ghostly thing under God, pressing against thy will or thy witting, or else wilfully drawn upon thee of set purpose for increasing of thy devotion, although it be a hindrance to this manner of work—that it is therefore evil. Nay, God forbid that thou take it so. But I say, that although it be good and holy, yet in this work it hindereth more than it profiteth. I mean for the time of this work. For surely, he that seeketh God perfectly, he will not rest finally in the thought of any angel or saint that is in heaven.

[1] Touch.

[2] *Sed esto securus in hoc, quod nullus mortalium sine nube et caligine clarissimam divinae imaginis visionem habere poterit in hac vita, Paulo attestante qui ait:* Videmus nunc per speculum in enigmate; *quamquam hic per gratiam sensationem eius quisquis poterit obtinere.*

THE TENTH CHAPTER

How a man shall know when his thought is no sin; and, if it be sin, when it is deadly and when it is venial

But it is not thus with the thought of any man or woman living in this life, or of any bodily or worldly thing whatsoever it be. For why, a naked sudden thought of any of them, pressing against thy will and thy witting, although it be no sin imputed unto thee—for it is the pain[1] of the original sin pressing against thy power, of the which sin thou art cleansed in thy baptism—nevertheless, if this sudden stirring or thought be not smitten soon down, then fast for frailty thy fleshly heart is fastened thereby with some manner of delight, if it be a thing that pleaseth thee or hath pleased thee before, or else with some manner of grumbling, if it be a thing that thou thinkest grieveth thee or hath grieved thee before. The which fastening, although it may be deadly in fleshly living men and women that be in deadly sin before: nevertheless, in thee, and in all other that have in a true will forsaken the world and are obliged unto any degree in devout living in Holy Church, whatso it be, privy or open, and thereto that will be ruled not after their own will and their own wit, but after the will and the counsel of their sovereigns, whatso they be, religious or seculars, such a liking or a grumbling fastened in the fleshly heart is but venial sin. The cause of this is the grounding and the rooting of your intent in God, made in the beginning of your living in that state that ye stand in by the witness and the counsel of some discreet father.

But if it so be that this delight or grumbling fastened in thy flesh-

[1] By the "pain" of original sin he means here the secondary effect of that sin, a certain derangement or disturbance of the harmonious balance of man's nature. Theologians reckon the damage to the soul under four heads: ignorance, malice, frailty, concupiscence; while the body has sickness, pain, and death. Our author mentions the effect of original sin on the faculties of the soul in Chaps. 64 to 66. These secondary effects remain after the soul has recovered sanctifying grace (the loss of which is the primary effect) by the sacrament of baptism. The Latin-version of this passage has: *Eo quod sit poena originalis peccati semper insistens contra potentiam tuam, licet ab ipso originali peccato in baptismo mundatus fueris, non autem ab eius fomite.*

ly heart be suffered so long to abide unreproved, that at the last it is fastened to thy ghostly heart (that is to say, thy will) with a full consent: then it is deadly sin. And this befalleth when thou, or any of them that I speak of, wilfully draw upon you the thought of any man or woman living in this life, or of any other bodily or worldly thing: insomuch, that if it be a thing the which grieveth or hath grieved thee before, there riseth in thee a painful passion and an appetite of vengeance, the which is called *Anger*. Or else a fell disdain and a manner of loathing of their persons, with despiteful and condemning thoughts, the which is called *Envy*. Or else a weariness and an unlistiness of any good occupation, bodily or ghostly, the which is called *Sloth*.

And if it be a thing that pleaseth thee, or hath pleased thee before, there riseth in thee a surpassing delight for to think on that thing, whatso it be. Insomuch, that thou restest thee in that thought, and finally fastenest thine heart and thy will thereto, and feedest thy fleshly heart therewith: so that thou thinkest for the time that thou covetest none other wealth, but to live ever in such peace and rest with that thing that thou thinkest upon. If this thought that thou drawest upon thee, or else receivest when it is put upon thee, and that thou restest thus in with delight be the worthiness of thy nature, or thy knowledge, or grace, or degree, or favour, or beauty: then it is *Pride*. And if it be any manner of worldly good, riches or chattels, or what man may have or be lord of: then it is *Covetousness*. If it be dainty meats and drinks, or any manner of delights that man may taste: then it is *Gluttony*. And if it be love or desire,[1] or any manner of fleshly indulgence, favouring or flattering of any man or woman living in this life, or of thyself either: then it is *Lust*.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

That a man should weigh each thought and each stirring after that it is, and always eschew recklessness[2] in venial sin

I SAY not this because I trow that thou, or any other such as I speak of, be guilty and cumbered with any such sins; but because I would

[1] The Latin has: *Si autem sit de carnali amore seu de carnali concupiscentia. . .*

[2] Carelessness, heedlessness.

that thou shouldst weigh each thought and each stirring after that it is, and because I would that thou shouldst travail busily to destroy the first stirring and thought of these things that thou mayest thus sin in. For one thing I tell thee: that whoso weigheth not, or setteth little by, the first thought—yea, though it be no sin unto him—that he, whosoever he be, shall not eschew recklessness in venial sin. Venial sin shall no man utterly eschew in this deadly life. But recklessness in venial sin should always be eschewed by all the true disciples of perfection; and else I have no wonder though they soon sin deadly.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

That by virtue of this work not only is sin destroyed, but also virtues be gotten

And therefore, if thou wilt stand and not fall, cease never in thine intent, but beat evermore on this *cloud of unknowing* that is betwixt thee and thy God with a sharp dart of longing love. And loathe to think on aught under God. And go not thence for anything that befalleth. For this only by itself is that work that destroyeth the ground and the root of sin. Fast thou never so much, watch thou never so long, rise thou never so early, lie thou never so hard, wear thou never so sharp;[1] yea, and if it were lawful to do—as it is not—though thou put out thine eyes, cut thy tongue out of thy mouth, stop up thine ears and thy nose never so fast, shear away thy privy members, and do all the pain to thy body that thou couldst think: all this would help thee right nought. Yet will stirring and rising of sin be in thee.[2]

Yea, and what more? Weep thou never so much for sorrow of thy sins, or of the passion of Christ, or have thou never so much thought of the joys of heaven, what may it do thee? Surely much good, much help, much profit, and much grace will it get thee. But in comparison of this blind stirring of love, it is but little that it doth, or may do, without this. This by itself is the *best part* of Mary,

[1] Wear thou never so sharp a hairshirt.

[2] . . . *Hoc totum non potest te a fomite peccati et carnalibus titillationibus sive motibus liberare, quin debeant velis nolis quoad vixeris remanere.*

without these other. They without it profit but little or nought. It destroyeth not only the ground and the root of sin, as it may be here, but also it getteth virtues. For if it be truly conceived, all virtues shall be subtly and perfectly conceived, felt, and comprehended in it, without any mingling of thine intent. And have a man never so many virtues without it, all they be mingled with some crooked intent, for the which they be imperfect.

For virtue is nought else but an ordered and a measured affection,[1] plainly directed unto God for himself. For why, he in himself is the clean cause of all virtues: insomuch, that if any man be stirred to any one virtue by any other cause mingled with him—yea, though he be the chief—yet that virtue is then imperfect. As thus, for example, may be seen in one virtue or two instead of all the other; and well may these two virtues be meekness and charity. For whoso might get these two clearly, he needeth no more: for why, he hath all.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

What meekness is in itself, and when it is perfect and when it is imperfect

Now let us consider first the virtue of meekness:[2] how that it is imperfect when it is caused by any other thing mingled with God, although he be the chief; and how that it is perfect when it is caused of God by himself. And first we must know what meekness is in itself, if this matter shall clearly be seen and conceived; and thereafter may it more verily be conceived in truth of spirit what is the cause thereof.

Meekness in itself is nought else but a true knowing and feeling of a man's self as he is.[3] For surely, whoso might verily see and feel

[1] This definition occurs several times in Richard of St Victor: *Nihil aliud est virtus quam animi affectus ordinatus et moderatus* (e.g., *Benjamin Minor*, cap. 7).

[2] Meekness is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as "the quality of being meek; gentleness of spirit; humility". The Latin version translates by *humilitas*.

[3] The Latin has: *Humilitas nihil aliud est in se nisi vera cognitio quam homo*

himself as he is, he should verily be meek. Two things there be that be causes of this meekness, the which be these: One is the filth, the wretchedness, and the frailty of man, into the which he is fallen by sin, and the which he must always feel in some degree the whiles he liveth in this life, be he never so holy. Another is the over-abundant love and the worthiness of God in himself; in beholding of which all nature quaketh, all clerks be fools, and all saints and angels be blind. Insomuch, that were it not, through the wisdom of his Godhead, that he measured their beholding according to their ableness in nature and in grace, I cannot say what should befall them.

The second cause is perfect; for it shall last without end. And the other before is imperfect; for it shall not only fail at the end of this life, but full oft it may befall that a soul in this deadly body—for abundance of grace in multiplying of his desire, as oft and as long as God vouchsafeth to work it—shall have suddenly and perfectly lost and forgotten all knowing and feeling of his being, not considering whether he have been holy or wretched. But whether this fall oft or seldom to a soul that is thus disposed, I trow that it lasteth but a full short while. And in this time it is perfectly meeked, for it knoweth and feeleth no cause but the chief. And ever when it knoweth and feeleth the other cause associating therewith, although the second cause be the chief: then is it imperfect meekness. Nevertheless it is good and must be had; and God forbid that thou take it in any other manner than I say.

THE FOURTEENTH CHAPTER

That without imperfect meekness coming before, it is impossible for a sinner to come to the perfect virtue of meekness in this life

For although I call it imperfect meekness, yet I had rather have a true knowing and feeling of myself as I am, and sooner I trow would it get me the perfect cause and virtue of meekness by itself, than it should if all the saints and angels in heaven, and all the men and

habet de seipso. . . Compare St Bernard's definition: *Humilitas est virtus qua homo verissima sui cognitione sibi ipsi vilescit* (*De gradibus humilitatis*, cap. 1).

women of Holy Church living on earth, religious or seculars in all degrees, were set at once all together to do nought else but to pray to God for me to get me perfect meekness. Yea, and it is impossible for a sinner to get—or to keep when it is gotten—the perfect virtue of meekness without it.

And therefore swink[1] and sweat in all that thou canst and mayest, for to get thee a true knowing and a feeling of thyself as thou art; and then I trow that, soon after that, thou shalt have a true knowing and a feeling of God as he is. Not as he is in himself, for that may no man do but himself: nor yet as thou shalt do in bliss both body and soul together. But as it is possible, and as he vouchsafeth to be known and felt by a meek soul living in this deadly body.

And think not because I set two causes of meekness, one perfect and the other imperfect, that I wish therefore that thou leave the travail about imperfect meekness and set thee wholly to get the perfect. Nay, surely, I trow thou shouldst never so bring it about. But therefore I do what I do: because I think to tell thee and let thee see the worthiness of this ghostly exercise before all other exercise bodily or ghostly that man can or may do by grace; how that a privy love, set in cleanness of spirit upon this dark *cloud of unknowing* betwixt thee and thy God, subtly and perfectly containeth in it the perfect virtue of meekness, without any special or clear beholding of anything under God. And also, because I would that thou knewest which were perfect meekness, and settest it as a mark before the love of thine heart, and didst it for thee and for me. And because I would by this knowing make thee more meek.

For ofttimes it befalleth that lacking of knowing is cause of much pride, as me thinketh. For peradventure, if thou knewest not which were perfect meekness, thou shouldst ween, when thou hadst a little knowing and a feeling of this that I call imperfect meekness, that thou hadst nearly gotten perfect meekness; and so shouldst thou deceive thyself, and ween that thou wert full meek, when thou wert all belapped in foul stinking pride.[2] And therefore travail busily about perfect meekness; for the condition of it is such, that whoso hath it and while he hath it, he shall not sin; nor yet much after.

[1] Toil, labour.

[2] *Foetidissimo elationis sterquilinio totaliter involutus.*

THE FIFTEENTH CHAPTER

A short proof against their error that say that there is no perfecter cause to be meeked under than is the thought of a man's own wretchedness

And trust steadfastly that there is such a perfect meekness as I speak of, and that it may be come to through grace in this life. And this I say in confusion of their error that say that there is no perfecter cause of meekness than is that which is raised by the thought of our wretchedness and our former sins.

I grant well that to them that have been in customary sins (as I am myself and have been[1]), it is the most needful and speedful cause: to be meeked under the thought of our wretchedness and our former sins, ever till the time be that the great rust of sin be in great part rubbed away, our conscience and our counsel[2] to witness. But to others that be as it were innocents, the which never sinned deadly with an abiding will and advisement, but through frailty and unknowing, and the which set them to be contemplatives—and to us both, if our counsel and our conscience witness our lawful amendment, in contrition and in confession and in making satisfaction, after the statute of all Holy Church, and, moreover, if we feel us stirred and called by grace to be contemplatives—there is then another cause to be meeked under, as far above this cause as is the living of our Lady Saint Mary above the living of the sinfullest penitent in Holy Church; or the living of Christ above the living of any other man in this life; or else the living of an angel in heaven, the which never felt—nor shall feel—frailty, is above the life of the frailest man that is here in this world.

For if it so were that there were no perfect cause to be meeked

[1] The annotator of the (Bodleian) Douce MS. 262 has the note: *O Hilton sanctissime, magna est humilitas tua!* Its text of the *Cloud* was transcribed by a monk of the London Charterhouse, William Tregoose (died 1514), and is annotated throughout in Latin by James Greenhalgh, a contemporary Carthusian of Sheen and a diligent student of the English mystics. The "annotator", as I call Dom Greenhalgh hereafter in these notes, assumes that Hilton is the author of the *Cloud*.

[2] Confessor or director.

under, except the seeing and feeling of wretchedness: then would I know of them that say so what cause they be meeked under that never see nor feel—nor never shall be in them—wretchedness nor stirring of sin: as our Lord Jesu Christ, our Lady Saint Mary, and all the saints and angels in heaven. To this perfection, and all other, our Lord Jesu Christ calleth us himself in the Gospel: where he biddeth that we should *be perfect* by grace *as he himself is* by nature.[1]

THE SIXTEENTH CHAPTER

That by virtue of this work a sinner truly turned and called to contemplation cometh sooner to perfection than by any other work; and by it soonest may get of God forgiveness of sins

Look that no man think it presumption that he that is the wretchedest sinner of this life dare take upon him—after the time be that he hath lawfully amended him, and after he hath felt himself stirred to that life that is called contemplative, by the assent of his counsel and of his conscience—for to proffer a meek stirring of love to his God, secretly setting upon the *cloud of unknowing* betwixt him and his God. For our Lord said to Mary, in person of all sinners that be called to contemplative life: *Thy sins be forgiven thee.*[2] Not for her great sorrow, nor for her thought of her sins, nor yet for her meekness that she had in the beholding of her wretchedness only. But why then? Surely *because she loved much.*

Lo! here may be seen what a secret setting of love may purchase of our Lord, before all other works that man may think. And yet I grant well that she had full much sorrow, and wept full sore for her sins, and full much was she meeked in the thought of her wretchedness. And so should we do, that have been wretches and customary sinners: all our lifetime make hideous and wonderful sorrow for our sins, and full much be meeked in the thought of our wretchedness.

[1] Matt. v. 48: "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."

[2] Luke vii. 47.

But how? Surely as Mary did. She, although she might not unfeel the deep hearty sorrow for her sins—for why, all her lifetime she had them with her whereso she went, as it were in a burthen bounden together and laid up full privily in the hole of her heart, in manner never to be forgotten—nevertheless it may be said and confirmed by Scripture that she had a more hearty sorrow, a more doleful desire, and a more deep sighing, and more she languished—yea! almost to the death—for lacking of love, although she had full much love—and have no wonder thereat, for it is the condition of a true lover that the more he loveth, the more he longeth to love—than she had for any thought of her sins.

And yet she knew well and felt well in herself with a sober certainty that she was a wretch most foul of all other, and that her sins had made a division betwixt her and her God that she loved so much: and also that they were in great part the cause of her languishing sickness for lacking of love. But what of that? Came she therefore down from the height of desire into the depth of her sinful life, and searched in the foul stinking fen and dunghill of her sins, searching them up one by one, with all the circumstances of them, and sorrowed and wept so upon them each one by himself? Nay, surely she did not so. And why? Because God let her know by his grace within in her soul that she should never so bring it about. For so she might sooner have raised in herself an ableness to have sinned again, than have purchased by that work any plain forgiveness of all her sins.

And therefore she hung up her love and her longing desire in this *cloud of unknowing*, and learned to love a thing the which she might not see clearly in this life by light of understanding in her reason, nor yet verily feel in sweetness of love in her affection. Insomuch, that she had ofttimes little special thought whether she ever had been a sinner or none. Yea! and full ofttimes I think that she was so deeply disposed to the love of his Godhead that she had but right little special beholding unto the beauty of his precious and blessed body, in the which he sat full lovely, speaking and preaching before her; nor yet to anything else, bodily or ghostly. That this be truth it seemeth by the Gospel.[1]

[1] For St Augustine's exposition of the Gospel texts concerning Martha and Mary, as typifying the active and contemplative lives—an exposition

THE SEVENTEENTH CHAPTER

That a true contemplative will not meddle with active life, nor with anything that is done or spoken about him, nor yet answer his blamers in excusing of himself

In the Gospel of Saint Luke it is written that when our Lord was in the house of Martha her sister, all the time that Martha made herself busy about the preparing of his meat, Mary her sister sat at his feet. And in hearing of his word she regarded not the business of her sister, although her business was full good and full holy, for it is the first part of active life; nor yet the preciousness of his blessed body, nor the sweet voice and the words of his Manhood, although it is better and holier, for it is the second part of active life and the first of contemplative life. But she regarded the sovereignest wisdom of his Godhead lapped in the dark words of his Manhood.[1]

Thither regarded she with all the love of her heart. For from thence she would not remove for nothing that she saw or heard spoken or done about her; but sat full still in body, with many a sweet, secret, and a listy[2] love set upon that high *cloud of unknowing* betwixt her and her God. For one thing I tell thee: that there was never yet pure creature in this life, nor never yet shall be, so high ravished in contemplation and love of the Godhead, that there is not evermore a high and a wonderful *cloud of unknowing* betwixt him and his God. In this cloud it was that Mary was occupied with many secret settings of love. And why? Because it was the best and the holiest part of contemplation that may be in this life. And from this part she would not remove for nothing. Insomuch, that when her

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which was accepted and used by later writers generally—see Abbot Butler's *Western Mysticism*, pp. 200-2.

The next four chapters are inspired especially by St Augustine's sermons on Luke x. 38-43—i.e., *De Verbis Domini*, 26 and 27. P.L., xxxviii. 613-18. E.g.: *In principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum: ecce quod Maria audiebat. Verbum caro factum est et habitavit in nobis: ecce Martha cui ministrabat.*

[1] *Summam Dei sapientiam in carne latitantem . . . intelligebat Maria*, Richard of St Victor, *Benjamin Major*, 1, c. 1.

[2] Zestful and joyous.

sister Martha complained on her to our Lord, and bade him bid her sister rise and help her and let her not so work and travail by herself, she sat full still and answered not with one word nor showed as much as a grumbling manner against her sister, for any complaint that she could make. And no wonder: for why, she had another work to do that Martha knew not of. And therefore she had no leisure to attend to her, nor to answer her at her complaint.

Lo! friend, all these works, these words, and this behaviour, that were showed between our Lord and these two sisters, be set in ensample of all actives and all contemplatives that have been since in Holy Church, and shall be to the Day of Doom. For by Mary is understood all contemplatives; for they should conform their living to hers. And by Martha, actives, in the same manner and for the same cause.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER

How that yet unto this day all actives complain of contemplatives, as Martha did of Mary; of the which complaining ignorance is the cause

And right as Martha complained then on Mary her sister, right so yet unto this day all actives complain of contemplatives. For if there be a man or a woman in any company of this world—whatsoever company it be, religious or seculars, I except none—the which man or woman (whichever that it be) feeleth himself stirred through grace and by counsel to forsake all outward business, and for to set him fully to live contemplative life, according to his knowledge and conscience and with good counsel: as fast, their own brethren and their sisters, and all their nearest friends—with many others that know not their stirrings nor that manner of living that they set them to—with a great complaining spirit shall rise upon them, and say sharply unto them that it is nought that they do. And as fast they will reckon up many false tales, and many true also, of the falling of men and women that have given themselves to such life before; and never a good tale of them that stand.

I grant that many fall and have fallen of them that have in seeming forsaken the world. And where they should have become God's

servants and his contemplatives—because they would not rule them by true ghostly counsel—have become the devil's servants and his contemplatives; and turned either to hypocrites or heretics, or fallen into frenzies and many other mischiefs, to the slander of Holy Church. Of the which I forbear to speak at this time, for fear of troubling our matter. But nevertheless hereafter, when God vouchsafeth and if need be, we may see some of their conditions and the cause of their fallings. And therefore no more of them at this time; but forth on our matter.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER

A short excusation of him that made this book, teaching how all contemplatives should hold all actives fully excused of their complaining words and deeds

Some might think that I do little honour to Martha, that special saint, because I liken her words in complaining of her sister unto these worldly men's words, or theirs unto hers: and truly I mean no dishonour to her nor to them. And God forbid that I should in this work say anything that might be taken in condemnation of any of the servants of God in any degree, and in particular of his special saint. For me thinketh that she should be full well held excused of her complaint, taking regard to the time and the manner in which she said it. For of what she said, her unknowing was the cause. And no wonder if she knew not at that time how Mary was occupied; for I trow that before she had little heard of such perfection. And also, what she said was but courteously and in a few words; and therefore she should always be held excused.

And so me thinketh that these worldly-living men and women should also full well be held excused of their complaining words touched before, although they say rudely what they say: having regard to their ignorance. Because right as Martha knew full little what Mary her sister did when she complained of her to our Lord; right so in the same manner these folk nowadays know full little, or else nought, what these young disciples of God mean, when they set them from the business of this world, and draw them to be God's special servants in holiness and rightfulness of spirit. And if they

knew, truly I dare say that they would neither do nor say as they say. And therefore me thinketh that they should always be held excused: because they know no better living than is that that they live in themselves. And also when I think on mine innumerable faults, the which I have made myself before this time in words and deeds for default of knowing, me thinketh then, if I would be held excused by God for mine ignorant faults, that I should charitably and pitifully hold other men's ignorant words and deeds always excused.[1] And surely else do I not to others as I would others did to me.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER

How Almighty God will ghostly answer for all those that for the excusing of themselves will not leave their business about the love of him

And therefore me thinketh that they that set them to be contemplatives should not only hold active men excused of their complaining words, but also me thinketh that they should be so occupied in spirit that they should take little heed or none what men did or said about them. Thus did Mary, the ensample of us all, when Martha her sister complained to our Lord; and if we will truly do thus, our Lord will do now for us as he did then for Mary.[2]

And how was that? Surely thus. Our lovely Lord Jesu Christ, unto whom no privy thing is hid, although he was required by Martha as judge to bid Mary rise and help her to serve him; nevertheless, because he perceived that Mary was fervently occupied in spirit about the love of his Godhead, therefore courteously, and as it was seemly for him to do by the way of reason, he answered for her, who for the excusing of herself would not leave the love of him. And how answered he? Surely not only as judge, as he was by Martha appealed: but as an advocate lawfully defended her that loved him, and said: "*Martha, Martha!*" Twice for her good he named her name; for he would that she heard him and took heed to his words. "*Thou art full busy*," he said, "*and troubled about many things.*" For they that be actives must always be busied and travailed about many

[1] The annotator: *Humilitas auctoris et prudentia.* [2] Luke x. 38-41.

diverse things, the which they need, first to have to their own use, and then for deeds of mercy to their even Christian,[1] as charity asketh. And this he said to Martha, because he would let her know that her business was good and profitable to the health of her soul. But for this, that she should not think that it were the best work of all that man might do, therefore he added and said: "*But one thing is necessary.*"

And what is that *one thing*? Surely that God be loved and praised by himself, above all other business bodily or ghostly that man may do. And in order that Martha should not think that she might both love God and praise him above all other business bodily and ghostly, and also be busy about the necessaries of this life: therefore to deliver her of doubt that she might serve God both in bodily business and ghostly together perfectly—imperfectly she may, but not perfectly—he added and said that Mary had *chosen the best part, the which should never be taken from her.* For that perfect stirring of love that beginneth here is even in number with that that shall last without end in the bliss of heaven; for it is all one.[2]

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER

The true exposition of this Gospel word: *Mary hath chosen the best part*

WHAT meaneth this: *Mary hath chosen the best?* Wheresoever the best is set or named, it asketh before it these two things: a good and a better; so that it be the best, and the third in number. But which be these three good things, of the which Mary chose the best? Three lives be they not, for Holy Church maketh no mention but of two: active life and contemplative life; the which' two lives be privily understood in the story of this Gospel by these two sisters Martha and Mary: by Martha active, by Mary contemplative. Without one of these two lives may no man be saved; and where no more be but two, may no man choose the best.

[1] Fellow Christians.

[2] Faith and hope give way to vision; but the life of love (charity), begun here, is continued uninterruptedly in heaven (1 Cor. xiii).

But, although there be but two lives, yet in these two lives there be three parts, each one better than other. The which three, each one by itself, be specially set in their places before in this writing.[1] For, as it is said before, the first part standeth in good and honest bodily works of mercy and charity; and this is the first degree of active life, as it is said before. The second part of these two lives lieth in good ghostly meditations of a man's own wretchedness, of the passion of Christ, and of the joys of heaven. The first part is good, and this part is the better, for this is the second degree of active life and the first of contemplative life. In this part are contemplative life and active life coupled together in ghostly kinship and made sisters, after the ensample of Martha and Mary. Thus high may an active come to contemplation, and no higher; except it be full seldom and by a special grace. Thus low may a contemplative come towards active life, and no lower; except it be full seldom and in great need.

The third part of these two lives hangeth in this dark *cloud of unknowing*, with many a secret love set unto God by himself. The first part is good, the second is better, but the third is best of all. This is the *best part* of Mary. And therefore it is plainly to be noted that our Lord said not to Martha that *Mary hath chosen the best life*; for there be no more lives but two, and of two may no man choose the best. But of these two lives *Mary hath chosen*, he said, *the best part, the which shall never be taken from her.* The first part and the second, although they be both good and holy, yet they end with this life. For in the other life there shall be no need, as now, to use the works of mercy, nor to weep for our wretchedness, nor for the passion of Christ. For then shall no man hunger nor thirst, as now, nor die for cold, nor be sick, nor houseless, nor in prison; nor yet need burial, for then shall no man die.[2] But the third part that Mary chose, let him

[1] Chap. 8.

[2] An example may be given of the amplification which the Latin translator occasionally allows himself: *Et si cura sit tibi de mortuis, sive de sepultura loqui volueris: scito quoniam nullus ibi moritur; sed omnimodis tribulationibus et angustiis expertes vivent sine fine in illa caelesti patria, quae non nisi gaudia semper habet plena felicitate et beatitudine sempiterna. Et haec est merces eorum, sicut scriptum est:* Justi autem in perpetuum vivent et apud Dominum est merces eorum. *Quod si de sinistra parte, quae est damnatorum pars, aliquid*

choose who by grace is called to choose. Or if I trulier shall say: whoso is chosen to that part by God, let him listily[1] lean thereto. For that shall never be taken away; for it beginneth here, but it shall last without end.

And therefore let the voice of our Lord cry to these actives, as if he said thus now for us unto them (as he did for Mary to Martha, *Martha, Martha!*) "Actives, actives! make you as busy as ye can in the first part and in the second, now in the one and now in the other: and, if you wish right well and feel you disposed, in both boldly. And meddle you not with contemplatives. Ye know not what aileth them. Let them sit in their rest and in their play, with the third and the best part of Mary."

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER

Of the wonderful love that Christ had to Mary, in person of all sinners truly turned and called to the grace of contemplation

SWEET was that love betwixt our Lord and Mary. Much love had she to him. Much more had he to her. For whoso would utterly behold all that passed betwixt him and her—not as a trifler may tell, but as the story of the Gospel will witness, which in nowise may be false—he should find that she was so heartily set to love him, that nothing beneath him might comfort her, nor yet hold her heart from him. This is she, that same Mary, who, when she sought him at the sepulchre with weeping, would not be comforted by angels. For when they spake unto her so sweetly and so lovely and said: *Weep not, Mary; for our Lord whom thou seekest is risen, and thou shalt have him, and see him live full fair amongst his disciples in Galilee, as he said*,[2] she would not cease for them. Because she thought that whoso sought verily the King of angels, he would not cease for angels.

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sit dicendum, hoc est plane, quod caritas illis non poterit impertiri. Nam caritas est cum Deo et electis suis in caelo plena; sed illa dijudicatorum maledicta societas ab omni caritatis beneficio et ab universis misericordiae operum fructibus aeternaliter excludetur.

[1] Zestfully. [2] Matt. xxviii. 1-7; John xx. 11-13.

And what more? Surely whoso will look verily into the story of the Gospel, he shall find many wonderful points of perfect love written of her for our ensample, and as perfectly in accordance with the work of this writing, as if they had been set and written for this purpose. And surely so were they, take it whoso take may. And if a man will but see written in the Gospel the wonderful and special love that our Lord had to her, in person of all customary sinners truly turned and called to the grace of contemplation, he shall find that our Lord might not suffer any man or woman—yea, not her own sister—to speak a word against her, but that he answered for her himself. Yea, and what more? He blamed Simon the Leper in his own house, because he thought against her. This was great love: this was surpassing love.[1]

THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER

How God will answer and provide for them in spirit, that for business about his love will not answer or provide for themselves

And truly if we will listily conform our love and our living, inasmuch as in us is by grace and by counsel, unto the love and the living of Mary, no doubt but he shall answer in the same manner now for us ghostly each day privily in the hearts of all those that either say or think against us. I say not but that evermore some men shall say or think somewhat against us, the whiles we live in the travail of this life, as they did against Mary. But I say, if we will give no more heed to their saying nor to their thinking, nor no more leave off our ghostly privy work for their words and their thoughts than she did —I say then that our Lord shall answer them in spirit (if it shall be well with them that so say and so think) in such sort, that they shall within few days have shame of their words and their thoughts.

And as he will answer for us thus in spirit, so will he stir other men in spirit to give us our needful things that belong to this life, as meat and clothes and all these other, if he see that we will not leave the work of his love for business about them. And this I say in confusion of their error who say that it is not lawful for men to set them

[1] Luke vii. 36 ff.

to serve God in contemplative life, except they be secure beforehand of their bodily necessaries. For they say that *God sendeth the cow, but not by the horn.*[1] And truly they say wrong of God, as they well know. For trust steadfastly, whatsoever thou be that truly turnest thee from the world unto God, that one of these two shall God send thee, without business of thine own: and that is, either abundance of necessaries, or else strength in body and patience in spirit to bear need. What then recketh it which a man have? for all come to one in true contemplatives. And whoso is in doubt of this, either the devil is in his breast and reaveth him of belief, or else he is not yet truly turned to God as he should be, be he never so clever, or show he never so holy reasons to the contrary, whatsoever he be.

And therefore thou, that settest thee to be contemplative as Mary was, choose thee rather to be meeked under the wonderful height and the worthiness of God, the which is perfect, than under thine own wretchedness, the which is imperfect: that is to say, look that thy special beholding be more to the worthiness of God than to thy wretchedness. For to them that be perfectly meeked, no thing shall be wanting, neither ghostly thing nor bodily. For why, they have God, in whom is all plenty; and whoso hath him—yea, as this book telleth—he needeth nought else in this life.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

What charity is in itself, and how it is subtly and perfectly contained in the work of this book

And as it is said of meekness, how that it is subtly and perfectly comprehended in this little blind love set on God, when it is beating upon this dark *cloud of unknowing*, all other things being put down

[1] A medieval form of the proverb, "God helps those that help themselves." It occurs in the following form in a collection of such sentences:

Ipse laborato! Non dicas: "Dat Deus aurum";
Dat Deus omne bonum, sed non per cornua taurum.

But our author perhaps knew it from the *Scala Claustralium*, of which the old English translation has this passage: "And so, as who saith, he giveth the ox by the horn; that is, when he not called offereth his grace, and neither sought nor desired joineth himself unto them" (Douce MS. 322).

and forgotten; so it is to be understood of all other virtues, and in particular of charity.

For charity meaneth nought else but love of God for himself above all creatures, and of man for God even as thyself. And that in this work God is loved for himself and above all creatures, it seemeth right well. For, as it is said before, the substance of this work is nought else but a naked intent directed unto God for himself.

A *naked intent* I call it. Because in this work a perfect prentice asketh neither releasing of pain, nor increasing of reward, nor (shortly to say) nought but himself. Insomuch, that he neither recketh nor regardeth whether he be in pain or in bliss, but only that his will be fulfilled whom he loveth. And thus it seemeth that in this work God is perfectly loved for himself, and above all creatures. For in this work a perfect worker may not suffer the thought of the holiest creature that ever God made to share with him.

And that in this work the second and the lower branch of charity unto thine even Christian is verily and perfectly fulfilled, it seemeth by the proof. For why, in this work a perfect worker hath no special regard unto any man by himself, whether he be kin or stranger,[1] friend or foe. For all men seem alike kin unto him, and no man stranger. All men, he thinketh, be his friends, and none his foes. Insomuch, that he thinketh all those that pain him and do him hurt in this life, that they be his full and his special friends: and he thinketh that he is stirred to will them as much good as he would to the dearest friend that he hath.

[1] The Douce MS. 262 manifests a beginning of that modernization of the *Cloud* which was carried much farther in the late sixteenth century. Some of the author's words had passed out of use in 1500 and the scribe substitutes the current equivalents. In the present case he writes "kin or stranger", and there is the marginal note "*secundum auctorem:* syb or fremmed". The Parkminster MS., transcribed by Blessed William Exmewe (martyred 1535, at the dissolution of the London Charterhouse), takes the process a little farther. Toward the end of the same century came the drastic revision of the so-called Baker version.

THE TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

That in the time of this work a perfect soul hath no special regard to any one man in this life

I SAY not that in this work he shall have a special regard to any man in this life, whether he be friend or foe, kin or stranger. For that may not be if this work shall perfectly be done, as it is when all things under God be fully forgotten, as must be in this work. But I say that he shall be made so virtuous and so charitable by the virtue of this work, that his will shall be afterwards, when he condescendeth to converse with or pray for his even Christian—not that he should descend from all this work, for that may not be without great sin, but from the height of this work, the which is speedful and needful to do sometimes, as charity asketh—as specially then directed to his foe as to his friend, his stranger as his kin. Yea! and sometimes more to his foe than to his friend.

Nevertheless, in this work he hath no leisure to consider who is his friend or his foe, his kin or his stranger. I say not but he shall feel sometimes—yea! full oft—his affection more familiar to one, two, or three, than to all these other; for that is lawful to be, for many causes, as charity asketh. For such a familiar affection felt Christ to John, and to Mary, and to Peter before many others. But I say, that in the time of this work shall all be equally dear to him; for he shall feel then no cause but only God. So that all shall be loved plainly and nakedly for God, and as well as himself.

For as all men were lost in Adam, and all men, that with work will witness their will of salvation, are saved and shall be by virtue of the passion of only Christ, even so (as the experience of this work proveth)—not in the same manner, but as it were in the same manner—a soul that is perfectly disposed to this work, and thus oned with God in spirit, doth what in it is to make all men as perfect in this work as itself is. For right as if a limb of our body feeleth sore, all the other limbs be pained and distressed, or if a limb fare well, all the remainder be gladded therewith—right so is it ghostly with all the limbs of Holy Church. For Christ is our head, and we be the limbs, if we be in charity; and whoso will be a perfect disciple of our Lord's, he must strain up his spirit in this ghostly work, for the

salvation of all his brethren and sisters in nature, as our Lord did his body on the cross. And how? Not only for his friends and his kin and his dear lovers, but generally for all mankind, without any special regard more to one than to another. For all they that will leave sin and ask mercy shall be saved through the virtue of his passion.[1]

And as it is said of meekness and charity, so it is to be understood of all other virtues. For all they be subtly comprehended in that little setting of love touched before.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

That without full special grace, or long use in common grace, the work of this book is right travailous; and in this work, which is the work of the soul helped by grace, and which is the work of only God

And therefore travail fast awhile, and beat upon this high *cloud of unknowing*, and rest afterwards. Nevertheless a travail shall he have, whoso shall use him in this work; yea, surely! and that a full great travail, unless he have a more special grace, or else he have for long time used him therein.

But I pray thee, wherein shall that travail be? Surely not in that devout stirring of love that is continually wrought in his will, not by himself, but by the hand of Almighty God, who is evermore ready to work this work in every soul that is disposed thereto, and that doth what in him is, and hath done long time before, to enable him to this work.

But wherein then is this travail, I pray thee? Surely, this travail is all in treading down of the thought of all the creatures that ever God made, and in holding of them under the *cloud of forgetting* named before. In this is all the travail; for this is man's travail, with the help of grace. And the other above—that is to say, the stirring of love—that is the work of only God. And therefore do on thy work, and surely I promise thee he shall not fail in his.

Do on then fast; let me see how thou bearest thee. Seest thou not

[1] With this paragraph compare the very similar passage in the *Epistle of Privy Counsel*, Chap. 3, p. 109.

how he standeth and abideth thee? For shame! Travail fast but awhile, and thou shalt soon be eased of the greatness and of the hardness of this travail. For although it be hard and strait in the beginning, when thou hast no devotion, nevertheless afterwards, when thou hast devotion, it shall be made full restful and full light unto thee, that before was full hard. And thou shalt have either little travail or none; for then will God work sometimes all by himself. But not always, nor yet a long time together, but when he liketh and as he liketh; and then wilt thou think it merry to let him alone.

Then will he sometimes peradventure send out a beam of ghostly light, piercing this *cloud of unknowing* that is betwixt thee and him, and show thee some of his secrets, the which man may not and cannot speak. Then shalt thou feel thine affection inflamed with the fire of his love, far more than I can tell thee, or may or will at this time. For of that work that pertaineth only to God dare I not take upon me to speak with my blabbering fleshly tongue: and, shortly to say, although I durst I would not. But of that work that pertaineth to man, when he feeleth himself stirred and helped by grace, I like well to tell thee: for therein is the less peril of the two.[1]

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

Who should work in the gracious work of this book

First and foremost, I will tell thee who should work in this work, and when, and by what means: and what discretion thou shalt have in it. If thou ask me who should work thus, I answer thee: all that have forsaken the world in a true will, and also that give themselves not to active life, but to that life that is called contemplative life. All those should work in this grace and in this work, whatsoever they be, whether they have been customary sinners or none.

[1] The highest experience of the mystic, says Richard of St Victor, is the direct and sole work of God; it is an illumination which comes as a flash of lightning: *in modum fulguris coruscantis* (*Benjamin Minor*, cap. 82; *Benjamin Major*, v. 5). St Bernard speaks of the same experience coming *veluti in velocitate corusci luminis* (*In Cantica*, sermo xli). St Bonaventure in his *Itinerarium mentis in Deum* follows Richard closely, and Dante speaks of the same thing in the last lines of the *Divina Commedia*.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

That a man should not presume to work in this work before the time that he be lawfully cleansed in conscience of all his special deeds of sin

But if thou ask me when they shall work in this work, then I answer thee and say: not till they have cleansed their conscience of all their special deeds of sin done before, according to the common ordinance of Holy Church.

For in this work a soul drieth up in itself all the root and the ground of sin that will always remain in it after confession, be it never so busy. And therefore whoso will travail in this work, let him first cleanse his conscience; and afterwards, when he hath done what in him is lawfully, let him dispose him boldly but meekly thereto. And let him think that he hath full long been holden therefrom. For this is that work in the which a soul should travail all his lifetime, although he had never sinned deadly. And the whiles that a soul is dwelling in this deadly flesh, it shall evermore see and feel this cumbrous *cloud of unknowing* betwixt him and his God. And not only that, but because of the pain of the original sin, he shall evermore see and feel that some of all the creatures that ever God made, or some of their works, will evermore press in his mind betwixt him and his God.

And this is the just judgement of God, because man, when he had sovereignty and lordship of all other creatures, wilfully submitted himself to the stirring of his subjects, leaving the bidding of God and his Maker: that he should therefore afterwards, when he would fulfil the bidding of God, see and feel all the creatures that should be beneath him proudly pressing above him, betwixt him and his God.

THE TWENTY-NINTH CHAPTER

That a man should bidingly travail in this work, and suffer the pain thereof, and judge no man

And therefore, whoso coveteth to come to the cleanness that he lost through sin, and to win to that well-being where all woe is

wanting, he must bidingly travail in this work, and suffer the pain thereof, whatsoever he be, whether he have been a customary sinner or none.

All men have travail in this work: both sinners and innocents that never sinned greatly. But far greater travail have those that have been sinners than they that have been none; and that with great reason. Nevertheless, ofttimes it befalleth that some, that have been horrible and customary sinners, come sooner to the perfection of this work than those that have been none. And this is the merciful miracle of our Lord, that so specially giveth his grace, to the wondering of all this world. Now truly I think that Doomsday shall be fair,[1] when God shall be seen clearly and all his gifts. Then shall some that now be despised and set at little or nought as common sinners, and peradventure some that now be horrible sinners, sit full seemly with saints in his sight: when some of those that seem now full holy and be worshipped by men as angels, and some of those, peradventure, that never yet sinned deadly, shall sit full sorry amongst hell's calves.[2]

Hereby mayest thou see that no man should be judged by others here in this life, for good or for evil that they do. Nevertheless deeds may lawfully be judged, but not the men, whether they be good or evil.

THE THIRTIETH CHAPTER

Who should blame and condemn other men's faults

But I pray thee, by whom shall men's deeds be judged? Surely by them that have power and cure of their souls: either given openly by the statute and the ordinance of Holy Church, or else privily in spirit at the special stirring of the Holy Ghost in perfect charity. Each man beware that he presume not to take upon him to blame and condemn other men's faults unless he feel verily that he be stirred by the Holy Ghost within in his work; for else may he full

[1] Beautiful and joyful. The Latin has: *Sed credo plane quod in die judicii valde jucundum erit et amoenum electis Dei sanctis quando ille clare absque nube videbitur et laudabitur in omnibus donis suis.*

[2] i.e., the devils. The Latin has: *Cum vitulis infernalibus maestissime consedebunt.*

lightly err in his judgements. And therefore beware; judge thyself as thou wilt, betwixt thee and thy God or thy ghostly father, and let other men alone.[1]

THE THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER

How a man should behave in the beginning of this work against all thoughts and stirrings of sin

And from the time that thou feelest that thou hast done what in thee is, lawfully to amend thee according to the ordinance of Holy Church, then shalt thou set thee sharply to work in this work. And then, if it so be that thy former special deeds will always press in thy mind betwixt thee and thy God, or any new thought or stirring of any sin either, thou shalt stalwartly step above them with a fervent stirring of love, and tread them down under thy feet. And try to cover them with a thick *cloud of forgetting*, as though they never had been done in this life by thee or by any other man either. And if they rise oft, put them down oft: and (shortly to say) as oft as they rise, as oft put them down. And if thou thinkest that the travail is great, thou mayest seek arts and wiles and privy subtleties of ghostly devices to put them away: the which subtleties be better learned from God by experience than from any man in this life.

THE THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER

Of two ghostly devices that be helpful to a ghostly beginner in the work of this book

Nevertheless somewhat of this subtlety shall I tell thee as me thinketh. Prove thou and do better, if thou canst.

Do what in thee is to behave as though thou knewest not that they pressed so fast upon thee betwixt thee and thy God. And try to look as it were over their shoulders, seeking another thing: the which thing is God, enclosed in a *cloud of unknowing*. And if thou do

[1] The annotator observes: *Item in Scala ejusdem et Vitis Patrum;* "the same teaching in his *Scale* and in the *Lives of the Fathers*."

thus, I trow that within short time thou shalt be eased of thy travail. I trow that if this device be well and truly conceived, it is nought else but a longing desire unto God, to feel him and to see him as it may be here. And such a desire is charity; and it meriteth always to be eased.

Another device there is; prove thou if thou wilt. When thou feelest that thou mayest in nowise put them down, cower then down under them as a caitiff and a coward overcome in battle, and think that it is but folly to strive any longer with them; and therefore thou yieldest thyself to God in the hands of thine enemies. And feel then thyself as though thou wert overcome for ever. Take good heed of this device, I pray thee; for I think that in the proof of this device thou shouldst melt all to water.[1] And surely, I think, if this device be truly conceived, it is nought else but a true knowing and a feeling of thyself as thou art, a wretch and a filthy thing, far worse than nought: the which knowing and feeling is meekness. And this meekness meriteth to have God himself mightily descending, to venge thee of thine enemies, so as to take thee up and cherishingly dry thy ghostly eyes, as the father doth his child that is on the point to perish under the mouths of wild swine or mad biting bears.

THE THIRTY-THIRD CHAPTER

That in this work a soul is cleansed both of his special sins and of the pain of them, and yet how there is no perfect rest in this life

More devices I tell thee not at this time; for if thou have grace to feel the proof of these, I trow that thou shalt know better how to teach me than I thee. For although it be thus as I have said, yet truly

[1] The Latin version is *Videtur mihi quod in ipsius experientia seu probatione liquesceres animo quasi in aquam totaliter resolutus*. The metaphor is taken from the Canticle of Canticles (v. 6): "My soul melted when he spoke"; and Psalm xxi. 15: "I am poured out like water." It is used by Richard of St Victor, St Bernard, and others to express the effect of divine love on the soul. St Thomas Aquinas (*Prima Secundae*, Q. xxviii, Art. 5) numbers *liquefactio* among the effects of love: the heart is softened and made apt for the entry of the beloved.

I think that I am full far therefrom.[1] And therefore I pray thee help me, and do thou for thee and for me.

Do on then, and travail fast awhile, I pray thee, and suffer meekly the pain, if thou mayest not soon win to these devices. For truly it is thy purgatory. And then when thy pain is all passed and thy devices be given by God, and graciously gotten in custom: then it is no doubt to me that thou art cleansed not only from sin, but also from the pain of sin. I mean from the pain of thy former special sins, and not from the pain of the original sin. For that pain shall always last on thee to thy death day, be thou never so busy. Nevertheless it shall but little trouble thee, in comparison of the pain of thy special sins; and yet shalt thou not be without great travail. For out of this original sin will every day spring new and fresh stirrings of sin; the which thou must every day smite down, and be busy to shear away with a sharp double-edged dreadful sword of discretion. And hereby mayest thou see and learn that there is no certain security, nor yet no true rest in this life.

Nevertheless, thou shalt not therefore go back, nor yet be overmuch afraid of thy failing. For if thou mayest have grace to destroy the pain of thy former special deeds—in the manner aforesaid, or better if thou better mayest—sure be thou that the pain of original sin, or else the new stirrings of sin that be to come, shall but right little be able to trouble thee.

THE THIRTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

That God giveth this grace freely without any means, and that it may not be come to with means

And if thou ask me by what means thou shalt come to this work, I beseech Almighty God of his great grace and his great courtesy to teach thee himself. For truly I do well to let thee know that I cannot tell thee. And that is no wonder. Because it is the work of only God, specially wrought in whatever soul he liketh, without any merit of the same soul. For without it no saint nor angel can think to desire it. And I trow that our Lord as specially and as oft—yea! and more

[1] The annotator: "The humility of the author, as in the *Scale* and his other treatises."

specially and more oft—will vouchsafe to work this work in them that have been customary sinners, than in some other that never grieved him greatly in comparison with them. And this will he do, because he would be seen all-merciful and almighty; and because he would be seen to work as he liketh, where he liketh, and when he liketh.

And yet he giveth not this grace, nor worketh this work, in a soul that is unable thereto. And yet there is no soul without this grace, which is able to have this grace: none, whether it be a sinner soul or an innocent soul. For it is neither given for innocence, nor withholden for sin. Take good heed that I say *withholden*, and not *withdrawn*.[1] Beware of error here, I pray thee; for ever the nearer men touch the truth, the more wary must men be of error. My meaning is good: if thou canst not understand it, lay it beside thee till God come and teach thee. Do then so, and hurt thee not.

Beware of pride: for it blasphemeth God in his gifts, and by its blandishment emboldens sinners. Wert thou verily meek thou shouldst feel about this work as I say: that God giveth it freely without any desert. The condition of this work is such that the presence thereof enableth a soul to have it and to feel it. And that ableness may no soul have without it. The ableness to this work is oned to the work itself, without separation; so that whoso feeleth this work is able thereto, and none else. Insomuch, that without this work a soul is as it were dead, and cannot covet it or desire it. Forasmuch as thou willest it and desirest it, so much hast thou of it, and no more and no less: and yet is it no will, nor desire, but a thing thou knowest never what, that stirreth thee to will and desire thou knowest never what. Reck thee never if thou knowest no more, I pray thee; but do forth ever more and more, so that thou be ever doing.

And (if I shall shortlier say) let that thing do with thee and lead thee wheresoever it willeth. Let it be the worker, and thou but the sufferer; do but look upon it and let it alone. Meddle thee not therewith as though thou wouldst help it, for dread lest thou spill all. Be thou but the tree, and let it be the carpenter; be thou but the house, and let it be the husband dwelling therein. Be blind in this time, and shear away desire of knowing, for it will more hinder thee than help

[1] i.e., it may be withdrawn for sin. The Latin explains this fully.

thee. It sufficeth enough unto thee that thou feelest thyself stirred sweetly with a thing thou knowest never what, except that in thy stirring thou hast no special thought of anything under God, and that thine intent be nakedly directed unto God.

And if it be thus, trust then steadfastly that it is only God that stirreth thy will and thy desire, plainly by himself, without means either on his part or on thine. And be not afraid of the devil, for he may not come so near. He may never come to stir a man's will, except occasionally and by means from afar, be he never so subtle a devil. For sufficiently and without means may no good angel stir thy will; nor, shortly to say, anything but only God.

So that thou mayest here by these words understand somewhat—but much more clearly by experience—that in this work men shall use no means, and that men may not come thereto with means. All good means hang upon it, and it on no means; nor no means may lead thereto.

THE THIRTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

Of three means in the which a contemplative prentice should be occupied: reading, thinking, and praying

NEVERTHELESS there be means in the which a contemplative prentice should be occupied, the which be these: Lesson, Meditation, and Orison. Or else, for thine understanding, they may be called: Reading, Thinking, and Praying.[1] Of these three thou shalt find

[1] The annotator says that it is clear from this and from other passages that the *Cloud* was written in the first instance for an unlettered man. On the next sentence he observes: "From Blessed Walter [Hilton] learn here humility." The book referred to is perhaps the *Scala Claustralium* of Guigo II, prior of the Grande Chartreuse towards the end of the twelfth century. The *Scala* is printed twice in Migne, with the works of St Augustine (P.L., xl. 997 ff.), and with those of St Bernard (P.L., clxxxiv. 475 ff.), but has now been reclaimed for its true author by Dom Wilmart. It was translated into English in the fourteenth century as "a ladder of four rungs, by the which ladder men may well climb to heaven" (MS. Douce 322). The four rungs are Lesson, Meditation, Orison, and Contemplation, and Guigo emphasizes their interdependence in the same way as does our author. In close connection with his argument that "these four degrees be bound

written in another book by another man much better than I can tell thee; and therefore it needeth not here to tell thee of the qualities of them. But this may I tell thee: these three be so coupled together, that unto them that be beginners and profiters—but not to them that be perfect, as men may be here—thinking may not well be gotten without reading or hearing coming before. All one in a manner are reading and hearing: clerks read in books, and ignorant men read in clerks, when they hear them preach the word of God. And prayer may not well be gotten in beginners and profiters without thinking coming before. See by the proof[1] in the same course.

God's word, either written or spoken, is likened to a mirror. Ghostly, the eye of thy soul is thy reason; thy conscience is thy visage ghostly.[2] And right as thou seest that if a foul spot be in thy bodily visage, the eye of the same visage may not see that spot nor learn where it is, without a mirror or the teaching of another than itself: right so is it ghostly. Without reading or hearing of God's word it is impossible to man's understanding that a soul that is blinded in a habit of sin should see the foul spot in his conscience.

And consequently, when a man seeth in a bodily or ghostly mirror, or learneth by other men's teaching whereabouts the foul spot is on his visage, either bodily or ghostly: then first, and no sooner, he runneth to the well to wash him. If this spot be any special sin, then is this well Holy Church, and this water confession, with the circumstances thereof. If it be but a blind root and a stir-

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together and each of them serveth to other" comes the sentence, "The first degree is of beginners, the second of profiters, the third of them that be devout, the fourth of them that be holy and blessed with God," which also seems to be echoed in the next sentence of the *Cloud*. The classification is the old one of beginners, proficients, and the perfect (*incipientes*, *proficientes*, *perfecti*). See St Augustine's commentary on 1 John, tract v; and St Thomas, *Secunda Secundae*, Q. xxiv, Art. 9.

[1] By trial or experience, the usual meaning of "proof" in the *Cloud*. See the same phrase at the end of Chap. 63. So the Latin: *Vide per probationem ejusdem cursus.*

[2] So St Gregory in his *Morals* (II 1): *Scriptura sacra mentis oculis quasi quoddam speculum opponitur, ut interna nostra facies in ipsa videatur. Ibi etenim foeda, ibi pulchra nostra cognoscimus. . .*

ring of sin, then is this well merciful God, and this water prayer, with the circumstances thereof.

And thus mayest thou see that no thinking may well be gotten in beginners and profiters without reading or hearing coming before; nor praying without thinking.

THE THIRTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

Of the meditations of them that continually travail in the work of this book

But it is not so with them that continually work in the work of this book. For their meditations be but as it were sudden conceits and blind feelings of their own wretchedness, or of the goodness of God, without any means of reading or hearing coming before, and without any special beholding of anything under God. These sudden conceits and these blind feelings be sooner learned from God than from man. I care not though thou hadst nowadays no other meditations of thine own wretchedness, or of the goodness of God—I mean if thou feel thyself thus stirred by grace and by counsel—but such as thou mayest have in this word Sin, and in this word God, or in such other words, whichever thou wilt; not breaking nor expounding these words with curiosity of wit, in considering the qualities of these words, as if thou wouldst by that consideration increase thy devotion. I believe it should never be so in this case and in this work. But hold them all whole these words; and mean by sin a *lump*, thou knowest never what, none other thing but thyself. Methinketh that in this blind beholding of sin, thus congealed in a lump—none other thing than thyself—there should be no need to bind a madder thing than thou shouldst be in this time.[1] And yet, peradventure, whoso looked upon thee would think thee full soberly disposed in thy body, without any changing of countenance; but whether thou wert sitting or going, lying or leaning, standing or kneeling: he would think thee in a full sober restfulness.

[1] The reason is, says the annotator, that the mind in this state is intolerant of all impurity. An easier reading "find" occurs; but the best MSS. and the Latin version (*alligare*) support "bind".

THE THIRTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

Of the special prayers of them that be continual workers in the work of this book

And right as the meditations of them that continually work in this grace and in this work rise suddenly without any means, right so do their prayers. I mean their special prayers, not those prayers that be ordained by Holy Church. For they that be true workers in this work, they worship no prayer so much as those of Holy Church; and therefore they do them in the form and in the statute that they be ordained by holy fathers before us. But their special prayers rise evermore suddenly unto God, without any means or any premeditation in special coming before, or going therewith.

And if they be in words, as they be but seldom, then be they in full few words: yea, and the fewer the better. Yea, and if it be but a little word of one syllable, methinks it is better than of two, and more according to the work of the spirit; since a ghostly worker in this work should evermore be in the highest and the sovereignest point of the spirit. That this be truth, see by ensample in the course of nature. A man or a woman, affrighted by any sudden chance of fire, or of a man's death, or whatever else it be, suddenly in the height of his spirit he is driven in haste and in need to cry or to pray for help. Yea, how? Surely not in many words, nor yet in one word of two syllables. And why is that? Because he thinketh it over long tarrying, for to declare the need and the work of his spirit. And therefore he bursteth up hideously with a great spirit, and cryeth but one little word of one syllable: such as is this word Fire, or this word Out![1]

And right as this little word Fire stirreth rather and pierceth more hastily the ears of his hearers, so doth a little word of one

[1] The annotator says: "This English word *out* must not be supposed to mean *outside*, but is an interjection, like the Latin *heu*, *infandum*, *me miserum*, or the English *out out*, *alas*, *woe is me*." The Latin version of the passage is: *Ideoque semper in tali casu vehementer exclamat, eructans tantum syllabae unius breve verbum: sicut illud est in Anglicis dictum* fyre; *vel illud*, oute; *sive illud*, helpe. The Baker version has: "He bursteth out vehemently with a great shriek."

syllable, when it is not only spoken or thought, but secretly meant in the depth of the spirit; the which is the height: for in ghostliness all is one, height and depth, length and breadth. And rather it pierceth the ears of Almighty God than doth any long psalter unmindfully mumbled in the teeth. And therefore it is written, that *short prayer pierceth heaven.*[1]

THE THIRTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

How and why short prayer pierceth heaven

And why pierceth it heaven, this little short prayer of one little syllable? Surely because it is prayed with a full spirit, in the height and in the depth, in the length and in the breadth of his spirit that prayeth it. In the height it is, for it is with all the might of the spirit. In the depth it is, for in this little syllable be contained all the wits of the spirit. In the length it is, for might it ever feel as it feeleth, ever would it cry as it cryeth. In the breadth it is, for it willeth the same to all other that it willeth to itself.

In this time it is that a soul hath comprehended, according to the teaching of St Paul,[2] *with all the saints*—not fully, but in a manner and in part, as is fitting unto this work—*what is the length and the breadth, the height and the depth* of Everlasting and All-lovely, Almighty and All-knowing God. The everlastingness of God is his length; his love is his breadth; his might is his height; and his wisdom is his depth. No wonder though a soul, that is thus nigh conformed by grace to the image and the likeness of God, his maker, should be soon heard by God! Yea, though it be a full sinful soul—the which is to God as it were an enemy—if he might through grace come to cry such a little syllable in the height and the depth, in the length and the breadth of his spirit, yet should he for the hideous noise of his cry be always heard and helped by God.

See by ensample. He that is thy deadly enemy, if thou hear him so affrighted that he cryeth in the height of his spirit this little word Fire, or this word Out: then, without any regard to him for that he

[1] Latin: *Oratio brevis penetrat caelum*, deriving perhaps from Ecclus. xxxv. 21: "The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds."

[2] Eph. iii. 18.

is thine enemy, but for pure pity in thine heart stirred and raised by the dolefulness of his cry, thou risest up—yea! though it be about mid-winter's night—and helpest him to quench his fire, or to still and rest himself in his distress. Oh, Lord! since a man may be made so merciful by grace, to have so much mercy and so much pity of his enemy, notwithstanding his enmity, what pity and what mercy shall God have then of a ghostly cry in the soul, made and wrought in the height and depth, in the length and breadth of his spirit? For he hath all by nature that man hath by grace, and much more. Surely then without comparison much more mercy will he have. Since it so is, that that thing that is had by nature is nearer to each thing than that which is had by grace.[1]

THE THIRTY-NINTH CHAPTER

How a perfect worker shall pray, and what prayer is in itself; and if a man shall pray in words, which words are most suited to the property of prayer

And therefore must we pray in the height and the depth, in the length and the breadth of our spirit. And that not in many words, but in a little word of one syllable.

And what shall this word be? Surely such a word as is best suited to the property of prayer. And what word is that? Let us first see what prayer is properly in itself, and thereafter we may more clearly know what word will best suit the property of prayer.

Prayer in itself properly is nought else but a devout intent directed unto God, for the getting of good and removing of evil.[2] And therefore, since it so is that all evil is comprehended in sin (either by cause or by being), let us therefore, when we will intent-

[1] Mercy belongs to God by his nature, whereas man has it by grace. God's mercy may be called essential and man's accidental.

[2] The Latin version: *Sciendum ergo quod oratio nihil aliud est in se quam devota mentis intentio directa ad Deum propter bona adquirenda et mala quaevis penitus propulsanda*. The definition in the text is from the *Scala Claustralium: Oratio est devota cordis intentio in Deum pro malis amovendis et bonis adipiscendis*. The English version of the *Scala* has a rendering different from that in the text.

ly pray for the removing of evil, either say, or think, or mean nought else and no more words, but this little word SIN. And if we will intently pray for the getting of good, let us cry, either with word or with thought or with desire, nought else and no more words, but this word GOD. For in God is all good, both by cause and by being.

Have no marvel why I set these two words before all others. For if I knew any shorter words, so fully comprehending in them all good and all evil, as these two words do, or if I had been taught by God to take any other words, I would then have taken them and left these, and so I counsel that thou do. Study thou not about words, for so shouldst thou never come to thy purpose nor to this work, for it is never gotten by study, but only by grace. And therefore take thou none other words to pray in—although I set these here—but such as thou art stirred by God to take. Nevertheless, if God stir thee to take these, I counsel not that thou leave them—I mean if thou shalt pray in words, and else not. Because they be full short words.

But although the shortness of prayer be greatly commended here, nevertheless the oftness of prayer is not therefore restrained. For as it is said before, prayer is made in the length of the spirit; so that it should never cease till the time were that it had fully gotten that that it longed after. Ensample of this have we in a man or a woman afraid in the manner beforesaid. For we see well that they never cease crying this little word OUT, or this little word FIRE, till they have in great part gotten help in their trouble.

THE FORTIETH CHAPTER

That in the time of this work a soul hath no special regard to any one vice in itself nor to any one virtue in itself

Do thou, in the same manner, fill thy spirit with the ghostly meaning of this word SIN, and without any special regard unto any kind of sin, whether it be venial or mortal: pride, anger, or envy, covetousness, sloth, gluttony, or lust. What recks it in contemplatives what sin it be, or how great a sin it be? For all sins they think—I mean for the time of this work—alike great in themselves, when the

least sin separateth them from God, and hindereth them from their ghostly peace.

And feel sin a lump, thou knowest never what, but none other thing than thyself. And cry then ghostly ever this one cry: SIN, SIN, SIN! OUT, OUT, OUT! This ghostly cry is better learned from God by experience than from any man by word. For it is best when it is in pure spirit, without special thought or any pronouncing of word; unless it be seldom, when for abundance of spirit it bursteth up into word, so that the body and the soul be both filled with sorrow and the cumbering of sin.

In the same manner shalt thou do with this little word GOD. Fill thy spirit with the ghostly meaning of it without any special regard to any of his works—whether they be good, better, or best, bodily or ghostly—or to any virtue that may be wrought in man's soul by any grace; not considering whether it be meekness or charity, patience or abstinence, hope, faith, or soberness, chastity or voluntary poverty. What recks this in contemplatives? For all virtues they find and feel in God; for in him is everything, both by cause and by being. For they think that if they had God they would have all good; and therefore they covet nothing with a special regard, but only good God. Do thou in the same manner, as far forth as thou mayest by grace: and mean God wholly, and wholly God, so that nought work in thy mind and in thy will, but only God.

And because that ever the whiles thou livest in this wretched life, thou must always feel in some part this foul stinking lump of sin, as it were oned and congealed with the substance of thy being: therefore shalt thou alternately mean these two words—SIN and GOD. With this general understanding: that if thou hadst God, then shouldst thou lack sin; and mightest thou lack sin, then shouldst thou have God.

THE FORTY-FIRST CHAPTER

That in all other works beneath this, men should keep discretion; but in this none

AND furthermore, if thou ask me what discretion thou shalt have in this work, then I answer thee and say, "Right none!" For in all

thine other doings thou shalt have discretion, as in eating and in drinking, and in sleeping, and in keeping of thy body from outrageous cold or heat, and in long praying or reading, or in communing in speech with thine even Christian. In all these shalt thou keep discretion, that they be neither too much nor too little. But in this work shalt thou hold no measure: for I would that thou shouldst never cease from this work the whiles thou livest.

I say not that thou canst continue ever therein alike fresh, for that may not be. For sometimes sickness and other disordered dispositions in body and soul, with many other necessities of nature, will hinder thee full much, and ofttimes draw thee down from the height of this working. But I say that thou shouldst evermore have this work either in earnest or in game; that is to say, either in act or in will. And therefore for God's love beware of sickness as much as thou well mayest, so that thou be not the cause of thy feebleness, as far as thou mayest. For I tell thee truly that this work asketh a full great restfulness, and a full whole and a clean disposition, as well in body as in soul.

And therefore for God's love govern thyself discreetly both in body and in soul, and get thee thine health as much as thou mayest. And if sickness come against thy power, have patience and abide meekly God's mercy: and all is then good enough. For I tell thee truly that ofttimes patience in sickness and in other diverse tribulations pleaseth God much more than any liking devotion that thou mayest have in thy health.

THE FORTY-SECOND CHAPTER

That by indiscretion in this work, men shall keep discretion in all other things; and surely else never

But peradventure thou askest me how thou shalt govern thee discreetly in meat, and in drink, and in sleep, and in all these other. And hereto I think to answer thee right shortly: "Get what thou canst get."[1] Do this work evermore without ceasing and without

[1] "Take what comes." The Latin version interprets this sentence quite differently: *Tu autem ex dictis meis adquiras aliquid si quid potes*—i.e., "Get my meaning as well as you can." The next sentence is then the answer. The

discretion, and thou shalt know well how to begin and cease in all other works with a great discretion. For I cannot believe that a soul continuing in this work night and day without discretion may err in any of these outward doings; and else methinketh that he should always err.

And therefore if I might get a watchful and a busy beholding to this ghostly work within in my soul, I would then have a recklessness[1] in eating and in drinking, in sleeping and in speaking, and in all mine outward doings. For surely I trow that I should rather come to discretion in them by such a recklessness than by any busy beholding to the same things, as though I would by that beholding set a mark and a measure in them Truly I should never bring it so about, for aught that I could do or say. Let men say what they will, and let the proof witness. And therefore lift up thine heart with a blind stirring of love; and mean now sin, and now God. God wouldst thou have, and sin wouldst thou lack. God is wanting to thee; and sin art thou sure of. Now good God help thee, for now hast thou need!

THE FORTY-THIRD CHAPTER

That all knowing and feeling of a man's own being must needs be lost, if the perfection of this work shall verily be felt in any soul in this life

LOOK that nought work in thy mind nor in thy will but only God. And try to smite down all knowing and feeling of aught under God, and tread all down full far under the *cloud of forgetting*. And thou shalt understand that in this work thou shalt forget not only all other creatures than thyself, or their deeds or thine, but also thou shalt in this work forget both thyself and thy deeds for God, as well as all other creatures and their deeds. For it is the condition of a perfect lover, not only to love that thing that he loveth more than himself, but also in a manner to hate himself for that thing that he loveth.

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doctrine of this chapter is the theme of the *Epistle of Discretion* (*Cell of Self-Knowledge*, p. 95 ff.).

[1] Heedlessness.

Thus shalt thou do with thyself: thou shalt loathe and be weary with all that thing that worketh in thy mind and in thy will, unless it be only God. For otherwise surely, whatsoever it be, it is betwixt thee and thy God. And no wonder if thou loathe and hate to think on thyself, when thou shalt always feel sin a foul stinking lump, thou knowest never what, betwixt thee and thy God: the which lump is none other thing than thyself. For thou shalt think it oned and congealed with the substance of thy being: yea, as it were without separation.

And therefore break down all knowing and feeling of all manner of creatures, but most busily of thyself. For on the knowing and the feeling of thyself hangeth the knowing and the feeling of all other creatures; for in regard of it, all other creatures be lightly forgotten. For, if thou wilt busily set thee to the proof, thou shalt find, when thou hast forgotten all other creatures and all their works —yea! and also all thine own works—that there shall remain yet after, betwixt thee and thy God, a naked knowing and a feeling of thine own being: the which knowing and feeling must always be destroyed, ere the time be that thou mayest feel verily the perfection of this work.

THE FORTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

How a soul shall dispose itself on its own part, so as to destroy all knowing and feeling of its own being

But now thou askest me how thou mayest destroy this naked knowing and feeling of thine own being. For peradventure thou thinkest that if it were destroyed, all other hindrances were destroyed: and if thou thinkest thus, thou thinkest right truly. But to this I answer thee and I say, that without a full special grace full freely given by God, and also a full according ableness on thy part to receive this grace, this naked knowing and feeling of thy being may in nowise be destroyed.

And this ableness is nought else but a strong and a deep ghostly sorrow. But in this sorrow thou needest to have discretion, in this manner: thou shalt beware, in the time of this sorrow, that thou strain neither thy body nor thy spirit too rudely, but sit full still, as

it were in a sleeping device, all forsobbed[1] and forsunken in sorrow. This is true sorrow; this is perfect sorrow; and well were it with him that might win to this sorrow. All men have matter of sorrow; but most specially he feeleth matter of sorrow that knoweth and feeleth that he *is*. All other sorrows in comparison with this be but as it were game to earnest. For he may make sorrow earnestly that knoweth and feeleth not only what he is, but that he is. And whoso felt never this sorrow, let him make sorrow; for he hath never yet felt perfect sorrow. This sorrow, when it is had, cleanseth the soul, not only of sin, but also of pain that it hath deserved for sin; and also it maketh a soul able to receive that joy, the which reaveth from a man all knowing and feeling of his being.

This sorrow, if it be truly conceived, is full of holy desire; and else a man might never in this life abide it or bear it. For were it not that a soul were somewhat fed with a manner of comfort by his right working, he should not be able to bear the pain that he hath by the knowing and feeling of his being. For as oft as he would have a true knowing and a feeling of his God in purity of spirit (as it may be here), and then feeleth that he may not—for he findeth evermore his knowing and his feeling as it were occupied and filled with a foul stinking lump of himself, the which must always be hated and despised and forsaken, if he shall be God's perfect disciple, taught by himself in the mount of perfection —so oft he goeth nigh mad for sorrow. Insomuch, that he weepeth and waileth, striveth, curseth, and denounceth himself; and (shortly to say) he thinketh that he beareth so heavy a burthen of himself that he careth never what betides him, so that God were pleased. And yet in all this sorrow he desireth not to un-be: for that were devil's madness and despite unto God. But he liketh right well to be; and he giveth full heartily thanks unto God for the worthiness and the gift of his being, although he desire unceasingly for to lack the knowing and the feeling of his being.

This sorrow and this desire must every soul have and feel in itself (either in this manner or in another), as God vouchsafeth to teach his ghostly disciples according to his good will and their according ableness in body and in soul, in degree and disposition, ere the time

[1] Quite exhausted by sobbing.

be that they may perfectly be oned unto God in perfect charity—such as may be had here, if God vouchsafeth.

THE FORTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

A good declaring of some certain deceits that may befall in this work

But one thing I tell thee, that in this work a young disciple that hath not yet been well practised and proved in ghostly working may full lightly be deceived, and unless he soon beware and have grace to leave off and to meek him to counsel, peradventure be destroyed in his bodily powers and fall into fantasy in his ghostly wits. And all this along of pride, and of fleshliness and curiosity of wit.

And in this manner may this deceit befall. A young man or a woman, newly set to the school of devotion, heareth this sorrow and this desire read and spoken of: how that a man shall lift up his heart unto God, and unceasingly desire to feel the love of his God. And as fast in a curiosity of wit they conceive these words not ghostly, as they be meant, but fleshly and bodily; and travail their fleshly hearts outrageously in their breasts. And what for lacking of grace and pride and curiosity in themselves, they strain their veins and their bodily powers so beastly[1] and so rudely, that within short time they fall into weariness, and a manner of unlisty feebleness in body and in soul, the which maketh them to wend out of themselves and seek some false and some vain fleshly and bodily comfort without, as it were for recreation of body and spirit. Or else, if they fall not in this, they merit—for ghostly blindness, and for fleshly chafing of their nature in their bodily breasts in the time of this feigned beastly and not ghostly working—to have their breasts either inflamed with an unnatural heat, caused by misruling of their bodies or by this feigned working, or else they conceive a false heat wrought by the fiend, their ghostly enemy, caused by their pride and their fleshliness and curiosity of wit.

And yet, peradventure, they ween that it is the fire of love, gotten and kindled by the grace and the goodness of the Holy Ghost.

[1] Animally; in a purely physical or animal fashion.

Truly, from this deceit, and from the branches thereof, spring many mischiefs: much hypocrisy, much heresy, and much error. For as fast after such a false feeling cometh a false knowing in the fiend's school, right as after a true feeling cometh a true knowing in God's school. For I tell thee truly, that the devil hath his contemplatives as God hath his.

This deceit of false feeling, and of false knowing following thereon, hath diverse and wonderful variations, according to the diversity of states, and the subtle conditions of them that be deceived; as hath the true feeling and knowing of them that be saved. But I set no more deceits here but those with the which I trow thou shalt be assailed if ever thou purpose thee to work in this work. For what should it profit thee to learn how these great clerks, and men and women of other degrees than thou art, be deceived? Surely right nought. And therefore I tell thee no more but those that fall unto thee, if thou travail in this work. And therefore I tell thee this, so that thou mayest beware of them in thy working, if thou be assailed therewith.

THE FORTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

A good teaching how a man shall flee these deceits, and work more with a listiness[1] of spirit than with any boisterousness of body

And therefore for God's love beware in this work, and strain not thy heart in thy breast over-rudely nor out of measure; but work more with a list than with any idle strength. For the more listily thou workest, the more meek and ghostly is thy work; and the more rudely, the more bodily and beastly. And therefore beware. For surely the beastly heart that presumeth to touch the high mount of this work shall be beaten away with stones.[2] Stones be hard and dry in their nature, and they hurt full sore where they hit. And surely such rude strainings be full hard fastened in the fleshliness of bodily feeling, and full dry from any wetting of grace; and they hurt full

[1] A glad zest and sweet fervour of spirit.

[2] Heb. xii. 20 (referring to Exod. xix. 13): "And if a beast shall touch the mount it shall be stoned."

sore the silly soul, and make it fester in fantasies feigned by fiends. And therefore beware of this beastly rudeness, and learn to love listily with a soft and a demure behaviour, as well in body as in soul. And abide courteously and meekly the will of our Lord, and snatch not over-hastily, as it were a greedy greyhound, though thou hunger never so sore. And, to speak playfully, I counsel that thou do what in thee is to refrain the rude and the great stirring of thy spirit, as though thou wouldst on nowise let him know how fain thou wouldst see him, and have him, or feel him.

This is childishly and playfully spoken, thou thinkest peradventure. But I trow that whoso had grace to do and feel as I say, he should feel God gamesomely play with him, as the father doth with the child, kissing and clasping, that well were him so!

THE FORTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

A subtle teaching of this work in purity of spirit; declaring how a soul should show his desire on one manner unto God, and on the contrary unto man

LOOK that thou have no wonder why I speak thus childishly, and as it were foolishly and lacking natural discretion; for I do it for certain reasons, and as methinketh that I have been stirred many days, both to feel thus and think thus and say thus, as well to some other of my special friends in God, as now unto thee.

And one reason why I bid thee hide from God the desire of thy heart is this: because I think it would more clearly come to his knowledge, for thy profit and in fulfilling of thy desire, by such a hiding, than it would by any other manner of showing that I trow thou couldst show. And another reason is this: because I would by such a hid showing bring thee out of the boisterousness of bodily feeling into the purity and depth of ghostly feeling; and so furthermore at the last help thee to knit the ghostly knot of burning love betwixt thee and thy God, in ghostly onehead and accordance of will.

Thou knowest well that God is a spirit; and whoso would be oned unto him, it must be in truth and depth of spirit, full far from any feigned bodily thing. True it is that all thing is known to God,

and nothing may be hid from his knowledge, neither bodily thing nor ghostly. But since he is a spirit, that thing is more plainly known and showed unto him the which is hid in depth of spirit, than is anything that is mingled with any manner of bodilyness. For all bodily thing is farther from God by the course of nature than any ghostly thing. By this reason it seemeth that the whiles our desire is mingled with any manner of bodilyness—as it is when we stress and strain us in spirit and in body together—so long it is farther from God than it should be, if it were done more devoutly and more listily in soberness and in purity and in depth of spirit.

And here mayest thou see somewhat and in part the reason why that I bid thee so childishly cover and hide the stirring of thy desire from God. And yet I bid thee not plainly hide it; for that were the bidding of a fool, to bid thee plainly do that which in nowise may be done. But I bid thee do what in thee is to hide it. And why bid I thus? Surely because I would that thou shouldst cast it into the depth of spirit, far from any rude mingling of any bodilyness, the which would make it less ghostly and insomuch farther from God; and because I know well that ever the more that thy spirit hath of ghostliness, the less it hath of bodilyness and the nearer it is to God, and the better it pleaseth him, and the more clearly it may be seen by him. Not that his sight may be at any time or in anything more clear than in another, for it is evermore unchangeable; but because it is more like unto him, when it is in purity of spirit, for he is a spirit.

Another reason there is why I bid thee do what in thee is to let him not know. Thou and I, and many such as we, be so liable to conceive a thing bodily the which is said ghostly, that peradventure, if I had bidden thee show unto God the stirring of thy heart, thou shouldst have made a bodily showing unto him, either in gesture, or in voice, or in word, or in some other rude bodily straining, as it is when thou shalt show a thing that is hid in thine heart to a bodily man; and insomuch thy work should have been impure. For on one manner shall a thing be showed to man, and on another manner unto God.

THE FORTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

How God will be served both with body and with soul, and reward men in both; and how men shall know when all those sounds and sweetnesses that happen to the body in time of prayer be both good and evil

I SAY not this because I will that thou desist any time, if thou be stirred to pray with thy mouth, or to burst out, for abundance of devotion in thy spirit, for to speak unto God as unto man, and say some good word as thou feelest thyself stirred, as be these: "Good Jesu! Fair Jesu! Sweet Jesu!" and all such other. Nay, God forbid thou take it thus! For truly I mean not thus, and God forbid that I should separate what God hath coupled, the body and the spirit. For God would be served with body and with soul, both together, as seemly is, and reward man his meed in bliss both in body and in soul. And in earnest of that reward, sometimes he will inflame the body of a devout servant of his here in this life—not once or twice, but peradventure right oft and as he liketh—with full wonderful sweetness and comforts. Of the which, some be not coming from without into the body by the windows of our wits, but from within, rising and springing from abundance of ghostly gladness, and from true devotion of spirit. Such a comfort and such a sweetness shall not be held suspect: and (shortly to say) I trow that he that feeleth it may not hold it suspect.

But all other comforts, sounds, and gladness, and sweetness, that come from without suddenly, and thou knowest never whence, I pray thee have them suspect. For they may be both good and evil; wrought by a good angel if they be good, and by an evil angel if they be evil. But they may in nowise be evil, if those deceits of curiosity of wit and of inordinate straining of the fleshly heart be removed, as I teach thee, or better if thou better mayest. And why is that? Surely because of the cause of this comfort—that is to say, the devout stirring of love, the which dwelleth in pure spirit. For it is wrought by the hand of Almighty God without means; and therefore it must always be far from any fantasy, or any false opinion that may happen to man in this life.

And of the other comforts and sounds and sweetnesses, how thou

shouldst know whether they be good or evil, I think not to tell thee at this time: and that is because methinketh that it needeth not. Because thou mayest find it written in another place of another man's work a thousandfold better than I can say or write. And so mayest thou find this that I set here far better than it is here.[1] But what of that? Therefore shall I not forbear, nor shall it weary me, to fulfil the desire and the stirring of thy heart, the which thou hast showed thyself to have unto me before this time in thy words, and now in thy deeds.

But this may I say to thee about those sounds and those sweetnesses that come in by the windows of thy wits, the which may be both good and evil. Practise thyself continually in this blind and devout and listy stirring of love that I tell thee; and then I have no doubt that it shall well be able to tell thee of them. And if thou yet be in part astonished by them at the first time—and that is because they be unusual—yet this shall it do for thee: it shall bind thy heart so fast that thou shalt in nowise give full credence to them until thou be certified of them, either within wonderfully by the Spirit of God, or else without by counsel of some discreet father.

THE FORTY-NINTH CHAPTER

That the substance of all perfection is nought else but a good will; and how that all sounds and comforts and sweetnesses that may befall in this life be to it but as it were accidents

And therefore I pray thee, lean listily to this meek stirring of love in thine heart, and follow thereafter; for it will be thy guide in this life and bring thee to bliss in the other. It is the substance of all good living, and without it no good work may be begun nor ended. It is nought else but a good and an according will unto God, and a manner of well-pleasedness and a gladness that thou feelest in thy will at all that he doth.

[1] Cf. Richard of St Victor: *Benjamin Minor*, cap. 36 ff. The annotator says: "He was no braggart or boaster, but a man established in true and genuine humility." And "yet you have dealt with these things eloquently in your book to the anchorite"—i.e., in the *Scale*. The author may be referring in the text to Rolle: *Incendium Amoris*. Cf. Bk. I, Chap. xiv.

Such a good will is the substance of all perfection. All sweetness and comforts, bodily or ghostly, be to this but as it were accidents, be they never so holy; and they do but hang on this good will. *Accidents* I call them, for they may be had and lacked without breaking asunder of it. I mean in this life; but it is not so in the bliss of heaven; for there shall they be oned with the substance without separation, as shall the body (in the which they work) with the soul. So that the substance of them here is but a good ghostly will. And surely I trow that he that feeleth the perfection of this will (as it may be had here), there may no sweetness and no comfort happen to any man in this life, but he is as fain and as glad to lack it at God's will as to feel it and have it.

THE FIFTIETH CHAPTER

Which is chaste love; and how in some creatures such sensible comforts be but seldom, and in some right oft

And hereby mayest thou see that we should direct all our beholding unto this meek stirring of love in our will. And in all other sweetness and comforts, bodily or ghostly, be they never so pleasing nor so holy (if it be courteous and seemly to say), we should have a manner of recklessness.[1] If they come, welcome them; but lean not too much on them for fear of feebleness; for it will take full much of thy powers to bide any long time in such sweet feelings and weepings. And peradventure thou mayest be stirred to love God for the sake of them. And that shalt thou feel by this: if thou grumble overmuch when they be away. And if it be thus, thy love is not yet neither chaste nor perfect. For a love that is chaste and perfect, though it suffer that the body be fed and comforted in the presence of such sweet feelings and weepings, nevertheless it is not grumbling, but full well pleased to lack them at God's will.

And yet it is not commonly without such comforts in some creatures;[2] and in some other creatures such sweetness and comforts be but seldom. And all this is according to the disposition and the ordinance of God, and all for the profit and the needfulness of diverse

[1] Heedlessness. [2] Persons.

creatures. For some creatures be so weak and so tender in spirit, that unless they were somewhat comforted by feeling of such sweetness, they might in nowise abide or bear the diversity of temptations and tribulations that they suffer and be travailed with in this life from their bodily and ghostly enemies. And some there be that be so weak in body that they may do no great penance to cleanse them with. And these creatures will our Lord cleanse full graciously in spirit by such sweet feelings and weepings. And also, on the other hand, there be some creatures so strong in spirit, that they can pick them comfort enough within in their souls—in offering up of this reverent and this meek stirring of love and accordance of will—so that they need not much to be fed with such sweet comforts in bodily feelings. Which of these be holier or more dear with God, one than another, God knoweth and I not.

THE FIFTY-FIRST CHAPTER

That men should have great wariness so that they understand not bodily a thing that is meant ghostly; and in particular it is good to be wary in understanding of this word *in* and of this word *up*

And therefore lean meekly to this blind stirring of love in thine heart. I mean not in thy bodily heart, but in thy ghostly heart, the which is thy will. And beware that thou conceive not bodily that which is said ghostly. For truly I tell thee, that the bodily and fleshly conceits of them that have curious and imaginative wits be cause of much error.

Ensample of this mayest thou see, where I bid thee hide thy desire from God so far as in thee is. For if, peradventure, I had bidden thee show thy desire unto God, thou shouldst have conceived it more bodily than thou dost now, when I bid thee hide it. For thou knowest well that all that thing that is wilfully hidden is cast into the depth of the spirit. And thus methinketh that there is great need to have much wariness in understanding of words that be spoken with ghostly intent, so that thou conceive them not bodily, but ghostly, as they be meant. And in particular it is good to beware with this word *in*, and with this word *up*. For on misconceiving of

these two words hangeth much error and much deceit in them that purpose to be ghostly workers, as methinketh. Somewhat I know by experience, and somewhat by hearsay; and of these deceits I would tell thee a little, as methinketh.

A young disciple in God's school, new turned from the world, weeneth that for a little time that he hath given him to penance and to prayer, taken by counsel in confession, that he is therefore able to take upon him ghostly working, of the which he heareth men speak or read about him, or peradventure readeth himself. And therefore when they hear spoken or read of ghostly working, and in particular of this word, how a man shall *draw all his wits within himself*, or how he shall *climb above himself*—as fast for blindness in soul, and for fleshliness and curiosity of natural wit, they misunderstand these words, and ween, because they find in themselves a natural desire for hid things,[1] that they be therefore called to that work by grace. Insomuch, that if their counsel will not agree that they shall work in this work, as soon they feel a manner of grumbling against their counsel, and think—yea, and peradventure say to others like themselves—that they can find no man that can understand what they mean fully. And therefore at once, for boldness and presumption of their curious wit, they leave meek prayer and penance over soon, and set them (they ween) to a full ghostly work within in their soul. The which work if it be truly conceived, is neither bodily working nor ghostly working. And (shortly to say) it is a working against nature, and the devil is the chief worker thereof. And it is the readiest way to death of body and of soul, for it is madness and no wisdom, and leadeth a man even to madness. And yet they ween not thus: for they purpose them in this work to think upon nought but on God.

THE FIFTY-SECOND CHAPTER

How these young presumptuous disciples misunderstand this word *in*; and of the deceits that follow thereon

And in this manner is this madness wrought that I speak of. They

[1] "Hid" = secret, mystic. The Latin version goes astray here: *Quamdam naturalem concupiscentiam occultandi res.*

read and hear well said that they should leave outward working with their wits, and work inwards; and because they know not which is inward working, therefore they work wrong. For they turn their bodily wits inwards into their body against the course of nature; and they strain them, as though they would see inwards with the bodily eyes, and hear inwards with their ears, and so forth with all their wits, smelling, tasting, and feeling inwards. And thus they reverse them against the course of nature, and with this curiosity they travail their imagination so indiscreetly that at the last they turn their brain in their heads. And then as fast the devil hath power to feign some false light or sounds, sweet smells in their noses, wonderful tastes in their mouths, and many quaint heats and burnings in their bodily breasts or in their bowels, in their backs and in their reins, and in their privy members.

And yet in this fantasy they think that they have a restful contemplation of their God without any hindrance of vain thoughts; and surely so have they in a manner, for they be so filled with falsehood that vanity cannot disturb them. And why? Because he, that same fiend that would minister vain thoughts to them if they were in a good way—he, that same, is the chief worker in this work. And know thou right well that he would not hinder himself. The thought of God will he not put from them, for fear that he should be held suspect.

THE FIFTY-THIRD CHAPTER

Of divers unseemly gestures that follow them that lack the work of this book

MANY wonderful gestures follow them that be deceived in this false work, or in any species thereof, more than in them that be God's true disciples: for these be evermore full seemly in all their gestures, bodily or ghostly. But it is not so with these others. For whoso would or might behold unto them where they sit in this time, if it so were that their eyelids were opened, he should see them stare as though they were mad, and leeringly look as if they saw the devil. Surely it is good they beware; for truly the fiend is not far. Some set their eyes in their heads as though they were

sturdy[1] sheep beaten in the head, and as though they should die anon. Some hang their heads on one side, as if a worm were in their ears. Some pipe[2] when they should speak, as if there were no spirit in their bodies; and this is the proper condition of a hypocrite. Some cry and whine in their throats, so greedy be they and hasty to say what they think; and this is the condition of heretics, and of them that with presumption and curiosity of wit will always maintain error.

Many disordered and unseemly gestures follow on this error, whoso might perceive all. Nevertheless, some there be that be so clever that they can restrain themselves in great part when they come before men. But might these men be seen in a place where they be homely, then I trow they should not be hid. And yet I trow that whoso would straitly gainsay their opinion, that they should soon see them burst out in some point; and yet they think that all that ever they do is done for the love of God and to maintain the truth. Now truly I think that unless God show his merciful miracle and make them soon desist, they shall love God so long in this manner that they shall go staring mad to the devil. I say not that the devil hath so perfect a servant in this life that is deceived and infected with all these fantasies that I set here. And yet it may be that one —yea, and many a one—be infected with them all. But I say that he hath no perfect hypocrite nor heretic on earth, but that he is guilty in some that I have said, or peradventure shall say, if God vouchsafeth.

For some men are so cumbered with nice curious gestures in bodily bearing, that when they shall aught hear, they writhe their heads on one side quaintly, and up with the chin; they gape with their mouths, as though they would hear with their mouths and not with their ears. Some, when they should speak, point with their fingers, either on their fingers, or on their own breasts, or on theirs that they speak to. Some can neither sit still, stand still, nor lie still, unless they be either wagging with their feet, or else somewhat doing with their hands. Some row with their arms in the time of their speaking, as though they needed to swim over a great water. Some be evermore smiling and laughing at every other word that

[1] Giddy. The Latin is: *Oves morbidae et insanae.*

[2] Squeak; utter a thin, shrill sound.

they speak, as they were giddy girls or silly jesting jugglers lacking behaviour.[1] Better far were a modest countenance, with sober and demure bearing of body and mirth in manner.

I say not that all these unseemly gestures be great sins in themselves, nor yet that all those that do them be great sinners themselves. But I say that if these unseemly and disordered gestures be governors of that man that doth them, insomuch that he cannot leave them when he will: I say then that they be tokens of pride and curiosity of wit, and of disordered display and desire of knowing.

And in particular they be very tokens of unstableness of heart and unrestfulness of mind, and especially of the lacking of the work of this book. And this is the only reason why I set so many of these deceits here in this writing: for why, that a ghostly worker shall prove his work by them.[2]

THE FIFTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

How that by virtue of this work a man is governed full wisely and made full seemly, as well in body as in soul

WHOSO had this work, it should govern him full seemly, as well in body as in soul: and make him full favourable[3] unto each man or woman that looked upon him. Insomuch, that the worst-favoured man or woman that liveth in this life, if they might come by grace to work in this work, their favour should suddenly and graciously be changed, so that each good man that saw them should be fain and joyful to have them in company, and full much they should think that they were pleased in spirit and helped by grace unto God in their presence.

And therefore get this gift, whoso by grace get may; for whoso hath it verily, he shall know well how to govern himself by the

[1] The Latin is: *Tamquam essent insolentes juvenculae aut meretriculae, praestigiatorum vultibus moribusque utentes.*

[2] The author in this chapter makes some use of Hugh of St Victor, *De institutione novitiorum*, cap. 12, where similar quaint gestures, or antics, are described (P.L., clxxvi. 941 ff.). The annotator refers to St Jerome's epistle to Demetrias (Ep. cxxx; P.L., xxii. 1107).

[3] Attractive.

virtue thereof, and all that belongeth to him. He should well discern, if need were, all natures and all dispositions. He should know well how to make himself like unto all that conversed with him, whether they were customary sinners or none, without sin in himself: to the wondering of all that saw him, and to the drawing of others by help of grace to the work of that same spirit that he worketh in himself.

His countenance and his words should be full of ghostly wisdom, full of fire and of fruit, spoken in sober certainty without any falsehood, far from any feigning or piping of hypocrites. For some there be that with all their powers, inner and outer, study in their speaking how they may stuff and underprop themselves on each side from falling, with many meek piping words and gestures of devotion; striving more to seem holy in the sight of men than to be so in the sight of God and his angels. For why, these folk will care more, and make more sorrow, for a disordered gesture, or unseemly or unfitting word spoken before men, than they will for a thousand vain thoughts and stinking stirrings of sin wilfully drawn upon them, or recklessly voided in the sight of God and the saints and the angels in heaven. Ah, Lord God! surely there is pride within where such meek piping words be so plentiful without. I grant well that it is fitting and seemly for them that be meek within to show meek and seemly words and gestures without, according to that meekness that is within in the heart. But I say not that they shall then be showed in broken or in piping voices against the plain disposition of their nature that speak them. For if they be true, then be they spoken in sincerity, and in wholeness of their voice and of their spirit that speak them. And if he that hath a plain and an open boisterous voice by nature speak them poorly and pipingly—I mean except he be sick in his body, or else it be between him and his God or his confessor—then it is a very token of hypocrisy. I mean either young hypocrite or old.

And what shall I more say of these venomous deceits? Truly, I trow, unless they have grace to leave off such piping hypocrisy, that betwixt that privy pride in their hearts within and such meek words without, the silly[1] soul may full soon sink into sorrow.

[1] Poor, unfortunate, pitiable; *misera anima*.

THE FIFTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

How they be deceived that follow the fervour of spirit in condemning of sin without discretion

SOME men the fiend will deceive in this manner. Full wonderfully he will enflame their brains to maintain God's law, and to destroy sin in all other men. He will never tempt them with a thing that is openly evil. He maketh them like busy prelates watching over all the degrees of Christian men's living, as an abbot over his monks. All men will they reprove of their faults, right as though they had cure of their souls; and yet they think that they dare not else for God.[1] But they tell them their faults that they see. And they say that they be stirred thereto by the fire of charity and of God's love in their hearts; and truly they lie, for it is with the fire of hell, welling up in their brains and in their imagination.

That this is truth, it seemeth by this that followeth. The devil is a spirit, and of his own nature he hath no body, no more than hath an angel. But nevertheless, what time he or an angel shall take any body by leave of God, to make any ministration to any man in this life, according as the work is that he shall minister, thereafter in likeness is the quality of his body in some part. Ensample of this we have in Holy Writ. As oft as any angel was sent in body in the Old Testament and in the New also, evermore it was showed, either by his name, or by some instrument or quality of his body, what his matter or his message was in spirit. In the same manner it fareth with the fiend. For when he appeareth in body, he figureth in some quality of his body what his servants be in spirit.

Ensample of this may be seen in one case instead of all others. For as I have understood by some disciples of necromancy, the which profess the advocation of wicked spirits, and by some unto whom the fiend hath appeared in bodily likeness: in what bodily likeness the fiend appeareth, evermore he hath but one nostril, and that is great and wide; and he will gladly cast it up so that a man may see in thereat to his brain up in his head. The which brain is nought else but the fire of hell, for the fiend may have none other brain. And if

[1] *Cogitant et dicunt quod non audent ita non agere propter timorem Dei.*

he might make a man look in thereto, he wants no better. For at that looking he should lose his wits for ever. But a perfect prentice of necromancy knoweth this well enough, and can well ordain therefore, so that he harm him not.

Therefore it is that I say, and have said, that evermore when the devil taketh any body, he figureth in some quality of his body what his servants be in spirit. For he inflameth so the imagination of his contemplatives with the fire of hell, that suddenly without discretion they shoot out their curious conceits, and without any advisement they will take upon them to blame other men's faults over soon; and this is because they have but one nostril ghostly. For that division that is in a man's nose bodily, and the which separateth the one nostril from the other, betokeneth that a man should have discretion ghostly, and know how to dissever the good from the evil, and the evil from the worse, and the good from the better, ere that he gave any full judgement of anything that he heard or saw done or spoken about him, And by a man's brain is ghostly understood imagination; for by nature it dwelleth and worketh in the head.

THE FIFTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

How they be deceived that lean more to the curiosity of natural wit, and of learning got in the school of men, than to the common doctrine and counsel of Holy Church

Some there be that, although they be not deceived with this error as it is set here, yet for pride and curiosity of natural wit and letterly knowledge leave the common doctrine and counsel of Holy Church. And these with all their favourers lean over much to their own knowing. And because they were never grounded in this meek blind feeling and virtuous living, therefore they merit to have a false feeling, feigned and wrought by the ghostly enemy. Insomuch that at the last they burst up and blaspheme all the saints, sacraments, statutes, and ordinances of Holy Church. Fleshly living men of the world, the which think the statutes of Holy Church over hard for them to amend their lives by, they lean to these heretics full soon and full lightly, and stalwartly maintain them, and all because they

think that they lead them a softer way than is ordained by Holy Church.[1]

Now truly I trow that whoso will not go the strait way to heaven, they shall go the soft way to hell. Each man prove by himself. For I trow that all such heretics, and all their favourers, if they might clearly be seen as they shall on the last day, should be seen full soon cumbered in great and horrible sins of the world and their foul flesh secretly, apart from their open presumption in maintaining of error. So that they be full properly called Antichrist's disciples. For it is said of them that for all their false fairness openly, yet shall they be full foul lechers privily.[2]

THE FIFTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

How these young presumptuous disciples misunderstand this other word *up*; and of the deceits that follow thereon

No more of these at this time now; but forth of our matter, how that these young presumptuous ghostly disciples misunderstand this other word *up*.

For if it so be that they either read, or hear read or spoken, how that men should *lift up their hearts unto God*, at once they stare in the stars as if they would be above the moon, and hearken if they shall hear any angels sing out of heaven. These men will sometimes with the curiosity of their imagination pierce the planets, and make a hole in the firmament to look in thereat. These men will make a God as they like, and clothe him full richly in clothes, and set him on a throne, far more curiously than ever was he depicted on this earth.

[1] The Lollard movement was characterized by the alliance of its preachers (especially the chief of these, John Wyclif himself) with the anti-clerical nobility. Lollardy belongs, at least in its open manifestations, to the last quarter of the fourteenth and the first half of the fifteenth century.

[2] Some of the MSS. and the Latin version have this sentence in the singular: "It is said of him that for all his false fairness openly, yet shall he be full foul lecher privily." The annotator says: *Antichristus in publico quasi totus virtuosus, in privato invenietur vitiosus.* See St Gregory on Job, Bk. 9 xxxiii, Chap. 35.

These men will make angels in bodily likeness, and set them about, each one with diverse minstrelsy, far more curious than ever was any seen or heard in this life. Some of these men the devil will deceive full wonderfully. For he will send a manner of dew—angels' food they ween it—as it were coming out of the air, and softly and sweetly falling into their mouths; and therefore they have it in custom to sit gaping as though they would catch flies. Now truly all this is but deceit, seem it never so holy; for in this time they have souls full empty of any true devotion. Much vanity and falsehood is in their hearts, caused of their curious working. Insomuch, that ofttimes the devil feigneth quaint sounds in their ears, quaint lights and shining in their eyes, and wonderful smells in their noses; and all is but falsehood.

And yet they ween not so; for they think that they have the ensample of Saint Martin for this upward looking and working, that saw by revelation God clad in his mantle among his angels, and of Saint Stephen that saw our Lord stand in heaven, and of many other; and of Christ, that ascended bodily to heaven, seen by his disciples. And therefore they say that we should have our eyes upwards. I grant well that in our bodily observance we should lift up our eyes and our hands if we be stirred in spirit. But I say that the work of our spirit shall not be directed neither upwards nor downwards, nor on one side nor on the other, nor forward nor backward, as it is with a bodily thing. Because our work should be ghostly, not bodily, nor on a bodily manner wrought.

THE FIFTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

That a man shall not take ensample of Saint Martin and of Saint Stephen, for to strain his imagination bodily upwards in the time of his prayer

For as regards what they say of Saint Martin and of Saint Stephen, although they saw such things with their bodily eyes, yet they were showed but by miracle and to certify a thing that was ghostly. For know they right well that Saint Martin's mantle came never on Christ's own body substantially, for any need that he had of it to keep him from cold; but by miracle and in a likeness, for all us that

be able to be saved, that be oned to the body of Christ ghostly. And whoso clotheth a poor man and doth any other good deed for God's love, bodily or ghostly, to any that hath need, let them be sure that they do it unto Christ ghostly; and they shall be rewarded as substantially therefore as if they had done it to Christ's own body. Thus saith he himself in the Gospel. And yet he thought it not enough, unless he confirmed it after by miracle; and for this cause he showed himself unto Saint Martin by revelation. All the revelations that ever saw any man here in bodily likeness in this life, they have ghostly meanings. And I trow that if they unto whom they were showed, or we for whom they were showed, had been so ghostly, or could have conceived their meanings ghostly, that then they had never been showed bodily. And therefore let us pick off the rough bark, and feed us with the sweet kernel.[1]

But how? Not as these heretics do, the which be well likened to madmen having this custom, that ever when they have drunken from a fair cup, cast it to the wall and break it. Thus shall not we do, if we will well do. For we shall not so feed us on the fruit that we shall despise the tree; nor so drink that we shall break the cup when we have drunken. The tree and the cup I call this visible miracle, and all seemly bodily observances that agree with and hinder not the work of the spirit. The fruit and the drink I call the ghostly meaning of these visible miracles, and of these seemly bodily observances, as is the lifting up of our eyes and our hands unto heaven. If they be done by stirring of the spirit, then be they well done; and else be they hypocrisy, and then they be false. If they

[1] "Lesson," says the *Scala Claustralium*, "is without-forth in the bark, meditation within-forth in the pith." Compare also the beautiful prayer of the fourth chapter: "Lord, thou that wilt not be seen but by those that be clean of heart: I have done that in me is, read and deeply thought and ensearched what it is, and on what manner I might best come to this cleanness that I might thee know somedeal. Lord, I have sought and thought with all my poor heart! And, Lord, in my meditation the fire of desire kindled for to know thee, not only the bitter bark without, but in feeling and tasting in my soul. And this worthiness I ask not for me, for I am wretched and sinful and most unworthy of all other. But, Lord, as a whelp eateth of the crumbs that fall from the board of his lord, [give me] of the heritage that is for to come, a drop of that heavenly joy to comfort my thirsty soul that burneth in love-longing to thee!" (MS. Douce 322.)

be true and contain in them ghostly fruit, why should they then be despised? For men will kiss the cup, for wine is therein.

And what if our Lord, when he ascended to heaven bodily, took his way upwards into the clouds, seen by his mother and his disciples with their bodily eyes? Shall we therefore in our ghostly work ever stare upwards with our bodily eyes, to look after him if we may see him sit bodily in heaven, or else stand, as Saint Stephen did? Nay, surely he showed himself not unto Saint Stephen bodily in heaven because he would give us ensample that we should in our ghostly work look bodily up into heaven, if we might see him as Saint Stephen did, either standing or sitting, or else lying. For howso his body is in heaven—standing, sitting, or lying—no man knoweth. And more need not be known, but that his body is oned with the soul, without separation. The body and the soul, the which is the Manhood, is oned with the Godhead without separation also. Of his sitting, his standing, or his lying, we need not know, but that he is there as he liketh, and hath himself in body as it is most seemly for him to be. For if he show himself lying, or standing, or sitting, by revelation bodily to any creature in this life, it is done for some ghostly meaning, and not for any manner of bodily bearing that he hath in heaven.

See by ensample. By standing is understood a readiness of helping. And therefore it is said commonly by one friend to another, when he is in bodily battle: "Bear thee well, fellow, and fight fast, and give not up the battle over lightly; for I shall stand by thee." He meaneth not only bodily standing, for peradventure this battle is on horse and not on foot, and peradventure it is in going and not in standing. But he meaneth, when he saith that he shall stand by him, that he shall be ready to help him. For this reason it was that our Lord showed himself bodily in heaven to Saint Stephen, when he was in his martyrdom; and not to give us ensample to look up to heaven. As if he had said thus to Saint Stephen in person of all those that suffer persecution for his love: "Lo, Stephen! as verily as I open this bodily firmament the which is called heaven, and let thee see my bodily standing, trust stedfastly that as verily stand I beside thee ghostly by the might of my Godhead, and I am ready to help thee. And therefore stand thou stiffly in the faith and suffer boldly the fell buffets of those hard stones: for I shall crown thee in bliss

for thy meed, and not only thee, but all those that suffer persecution for me in any manner."

And thus mayest thou see that these bodily showings were done for ghostly meanings.

THE FIFTY-NINTH CHAPTER

That a man shall not take ensample from the bodily ascension of Christ, for to strain his imagination upwards bodily in the time of prayer; and that time, place, and body, these three, should be forgotten in all ghostly working

And if thou say aught touching the ascension of our Lord, that it was done bodily and for a bodily meaning as well as for a ghostly, because he ascended both very God and very Man: to this will I answer thee, that he had been dead, and then was clad with undeadliness,[1] and so shall we be at the Day of Doom. And then we shall be made so subtle in body and in soul together, that we shall be then as swiftly where we list bodily as we be now in our thought ghostly; whether it be up or down, on one side or on other, behind or before. All, I think, shall then be alike good, as clerks say. But now thou mayest not come to heaven bodily, but ghostly. And yet it shall be so ghostly that it shall not be in bodily manner: neither upwards nor downwards, nor on one side nor on another, behind nor before.

And know well that all those that set them to be ghostly workers, and especially in the work of this book, that although they read *lift up* or *go in*, and although the work of this book be called a *stirring*, nevertheless they must have a full busy beholding, that this stirring stretch neither *up* bodily, nor *in* bodily, nor yet that it be any such stirring as is from one place to another. And although it be sometimes called a *rest*, nevertheless they shall not think that it is any such rest as is any abiding in one place without removing therefrom. For the perfection of this work is so pure and so ghostly in itself, that if it be well and truly conceived, it shall be seen far removed from any stirring and from any place.

And it should with some reason rather be called a sudden *chang-*

[1] Immortality.

ing, than any stirring of place. For time, place, and body, these three, should be forgotten in all ghostly working. And therefore beware in this work that thou take no ensample from the bodily ascension of Christ, for to strain thine imagination in the time of thy prayer bodily upwards, as though thou wouldst climb above the moon. For it should in nowise be so, ghostly. But if thou shouldst ascend into heaven bodily, as Christ did, then thou mightest take ensample from it; but that may none do but God, as himself witnesseth, saying: *There is no man that may ascend unto heaven, but only he that descended from heaven, and became man for the love of men.*[1] And if it were possible, as it in nowise may be, yet it should be for abundance of ghostly working, only by the power of the spirit, full far from any bodily stressing or straining of our imagination bodily, either up, or in, on one side, or on other. And therefore let be such falsehood; it should not be so.

THE SIXTIETH CHAPTER

That the high and the nearest way to heaven is run by desires, and not by paces of feet

But now peradventure thou sayest: How should it then be? For thou thinkest that thou hast very evidence that heaven is upwards; for Christ ascended thither bodily upwards, and sent the Holy Ghost (as he promised) coming from above bodily, seen by all his disciples; and this is our belief. And therefore thou thinkest, since thou hast thus very evidence, why shalt thou not direct thy mind upward bodily in the time of thy prayer?

And to this will I answer thee so feebly as I can, and say: Since it so was that Christ should ascend bodily, and thereafter send the Holy Ghost bodily, therefore it was more seemly that it was upwards and from above than either downwards and from beneath, behind, or before, on one side or on other. But else than for this seemliness, he needed never the more to have gone upwards than downwards; I mean for nearness of the way. For heaven ghostly is as near down as up, and up as down, behind as before, before as behind, on one side as on other. Insomuch, that whoso had a true desire for

[1] John iii. 13.

to be at heaven, then that same time he were in heaven ghostly. For the high and the nearest way thither is run by desires, and not by paces of feet.[1] And therefore saith Saint Paul of himself and many others thus: *Although our bodies be presently here on earth, nevertheless our living is in heaven.*[2] He meant their love and their desire, the which ghostly is their life. And surely as verily is a soul there where it loveth, as in the body that liveth by it and to the which it giveth life. And therefore if we will go to heaven ghostly, we need not to strain our spirit neither up nor down, nor on one side nor on other.

THE SIXTY-FIRST CHAPTER

That, by the course of nature, all bodily thing is subject unto ghostly thing and ruled thereafter, and not contrariwise

NEVERTHELESS it is needful to lift up our eyes and our hands bodily, as it were into yonder bodily heaven, in the which the stars be fastened. I mean if we be stirred by the work of our spirit, and else not. For all bodily thing is subject unto ghostly thing and is ruled thereafter, and not contrariwise.

Ensample thereof may be seen by the ascension of our Lord: for when the time appointed was come that he willed to wend to his Father bodily in his Manhood—who never was nor never may be absent in his Godhead—then mightily, by the virtue of the Spirit God, the Manhood with the body followed in onehead of Person. The visible appearance of this was most seemly and most according to be upward.

This same subjection of the body to the spirit may be in a manner verily conceived in the proof of the ghostly work of this book by them that work therein. For what time that a soul disposeth him effectually to this work, then as fast suddenly—he himself that worketh perceiving it not—the body, that peradventure before he began was somewhat bent downwards, on one side or on other for ease of the flesh, by virtue of the spirit shall set itself upright, follow-

[1] *Non movetur anima pedibus sed affectibus* (St Augustine, *In Joannem*, tract. 48). The Latin version has: *Quia altissima et proxima via ad caelum (ut minus grammatice et magis intelligenter dicam) solo desiderio et non passibus pedum itur.*

[2] Phil. iii. 20.

ing in manner and in likeness bodily the work of the spirit that is done ghostly. And thus it is most seemly to be.

And for this seemliness it is that a man—the which is the seemliest creature in body that ever God made—is not made crooked to the earthwards, as be all other beasts, but upright to heavenwards.[1] Because it should figure in likeness bodily the work of the soul ghostly; the which should be upright ghostly, and not crooked ghostly. Take heed that I say upright *ghostly* and not bodily. For how should a soul, the which in its nature hath no manner of bodilyness, be strained upright bodily? Nay, it may not be.

And therefore beware that thou conceive not bodily that which is meant ghostly, although it be spoken in bodily words, as be these: *up* or *down*, *in* or *out*, *behind* or *before*, *on one side* or *on other*. For although a thing be never so ghostly in itself, nevertheless if it shall be spoken of—since it so is that speech is a bodily work wrought with the tongue, the which is an instrument of the body—it must always be spoken in bodily words. But what thereof? Shall it therefore be taken and conceived bodily? Nay, but ghostly.

THE SIXTY-SECOND CHAPTER

How a man may know when his ghostly work is beneath him or without him, and when it is even with him or within him, and when it is above him and under his God

And for this, that thou shalt be able better to know how they shall be conceived ghostly—these words that be spoken bodily—therefore I think to declare to thee the ghostly meaning of some words that pertain to ghostly working. So that thou mayest know clearly without error when thy ghostly work is beneath and without thee, and when it is within thee and even with thee, and when it is above thee and under thy God.[2]

All manner of bodily thing is without thy soul and beneath it in

[1] The annotator quotes Ovid:

> *Pronaque cum spectent animalia cetera terram,*
> *Os homini sublime dedit; caelumque tueri*
> *Jussit, et erectos ad sidera tollere vultus.*
>
> *Metamorphoses*, i. 84–6.

[2] See p. 19, footnote.

nature. Yea! the sun and the moon and all the stars, although they be above thy body, nevertheless they be beneath thy soul.

All angels and all souls, although they be confirmed and adorned with grace and with virtues, for the which they be above thee in cleanness, nevertheless they be but even with thee in nature.

Within thyself in nature be the powers of thy soul, the which be these three principal: *Mind*, *Reason*, and *Will*; and secondary: *Imagination* and *Sensuality*.[1]

Above thyself in nature is no manner of thing, but only God.

Evermore where thou findest written *thyself* in ghostly writing, then it is understood thy soul and not thy body. And then, according to the thing on the which the powers of thy soul work, so shall the worthiness and the condition of thy work be judged: whether it be beneath thee, within thee, or above thee.

THE SIXTY-THIRD CHAPTER

Of the powers of a soul in general, and how mind in special is a principal power, comprehending in itself all the other powers and all those things in the which they work[2]

MIND is such a power in itself, that properly to speak and in a

[1] The classification and treatment of the faculties of the soul in the next four chapters are inspired by Richard of St Victor, *Benjamin Minor*, chapters 3–6. Richard says that the rational spirit has two principal powers, reason and affection, and two subsidiary powers, imagination and sensuality. The ultimate source seems to be St Augustine, *De Trinitate*, xii. 3. See the commentary of St Thomas, *De Veritate*, 1 ad 2: *Augustinus ponit intelligentiam et voluntatem in mente*. St Augustine is the source also for the standard classification: "Memory, understanding, and will"; and the later MSS. and the editions have altered "mind" here to "memory." But I have hesitated to do this. What is wanted by the exposition is a comprehensive expression for all conscious activity, and "mind" seems to be more suitable for this purpose than "memory", which now bears a very limited sense. It should be remembered, however, that the word "mind" in Middle English connotes both mind and memory, and the author thus possessed a word which represents St Augustine's meaning more fully than either our modern "mind" or "memory".

[2] This treatise on the soul and its faculties has the appearance of an addition to the original plan of the *Cloud*, and may have existed separately;

manner it worketh not itself. But reason and will, they be two working powers, and so be imagination and sensuality also. And all these four powers and their works, mind containeth and comprehendeth in itself. And otherwise it is not said that the mind worketh, unless such a comprehension be a work.

And therefore it is that I call the powers of the soul, some principal, and some secondary. Not because a soul is divisible, for that may not be; but because all those things in the which they work be divisible, and some principal, as be all ghostly things, and some secondary, as be all bodily things. The two principal working powers, reason and will, work purely by themselves in all ghostly things, without help of the other two secondary powers. Imagination and sensuality work animally in all bodily things, whether they be present or absent; and they work in the body and with the bodily wits. But by them, without the help of reason and of will, may a soul never come to know the virtue and the conditions of bodily creatures, nor the cause of their beings and their makings.

And for this cause be reason and will called principal powers, because they work in pure spirit without any manner of bodilyness; and imagination and sensuality secondary, because they work in the body with bodily instruments, the which be our five wits. Mind is called a principal power because it containeth in itself ghostly not only all the other powers, but also all those things in the which they work. See by the proof.

THE SIXTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

Of the other two principal powers, reason and will; and of the works of them, before sin and after

REASON is a power through the which we separate the evil from the good, the evil from the worse, the good from the better, the worse from the worst, the better from the best. Before man sinned, might reason have done all this by nature. But now it is so blinded with the original sin that it cannot work this work unless it be illumined

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Cambridge MS. Kk. vi. 26 gives it over again, apart from the *Cloud*, under the title: *How the Powers of a Man's Soul stand in the Number of Five.*

by grace. And both reason itself, and the thing that it worketh in, be comprehended and contained in the mind.

Will is a power through the which we choose good, after that it be determined by reason; and through the which we love God, desire God, and rest with full liking and consent finally in God. Before man sinned, will might not be deceived in his choosing, in his loving, nor in none of his works; because it could then by nature savour each thing as it was. But now this may not be, unless it be anointed with grace. For ofttimes, because of infection of the original sin, it savoureth a thing for good that is full evil, and that hath but the likeness[1] of good. And both the will and the thing that it willeth, the mind containeth and comprehendeth in itself.

THE SIXTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

Of the first secondary power—that is to say, imagination; and of the works and of the obedience of it unto reason, before sin and after

IMAGINATION is a power through the which we portray all images of all absent and present things; and both it and the thing that it worketh in be contained in the mind. Before man sinned, was imagination so obedient unto the reason—to the which it is as it were servant—that it ministered never to it any disordered image of any bodily creature, or any fantasy of any ghostly creature; but now it is not so. For unless it be restrained by the light of grace in the reason, it will never cease, sleeping or waking, to portray diverse disordered images of bodily creatures; or else some fantasy, the which is nought else but a bodily conceit of a ghostly thing, or else a ghostly conceit of a bodily thing. And this is evermore feigned and false, and next unto error.

This disobedience of the imagination may clearly be conceived in them that be newly turned from the world unto devotion, in the time of their prayer. For before the time be that the imagination be in great part restrained by the light of grace in the reason—as it is in continual meditation of ghostly things, such as their own wretchedness, the passion and the kindness of our Lord God, with

[1] Appearance.

many such other—they may in nowise put away the wonderful and the diverse thoughts, fantasies, and images, the which be ministered and printed in their mind by the light and the curiosity of imagination. And all this disobedience is the pain of the original sin.

THE SIXTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

Of the other secondary power—that is to say, sensuality; and of the works and of the obedience of it unto will, before sin and after

SENSUALITY is a power of our soul, reaching and reigning in the bodily wits, through the which we have bodily knowing and feeling of all bodily creatures, whether they be pleasing or unpleasing. And it hath two parts: one through the which it regardeth the necessities of our body, another through the which it serveth the lusts of the bodily wits. For this same power is it that grumbleth when the body lacketh the things needful unto it, and that in the taking of the need stirreth us to take more than needeth in feeding and furthering of our lusts. It grumbleth in the lacking of pleasing creatures, and lustily is delighted in their presence. It grumbleth in the presence of displeasing creatures, and is lustily pleased in their absence. Both this power and the thing that it worketh in be contained in the mind.

Before man sinned was the sensuality so obedient unto the will—unto the which it is as it were servant—that it ministered never unto it any disordered delight or dislike in any bodily creature, or any ghostly feigning of delight or dislike made by any ghostly enemy in the bodily wits. But now it is not so; for unless it be ruled by grace in the will, so as to suffer meekly and in measure the pain of the original sin—the which it feeleth in the absence of needful delights and in the presence of speedful dislikes[1]—and to restrain itself from lust in the presence of needful delights, and from lusty pleasure in the absence of speedful dislikes: it will wretchedly and wantonly welter, as a swine in the mire, in the wealths[2] of this

[1] Things unpleasant, yet beneficial. The MS. reading is "grucching"—i.e., that which causes murmuring or grumbling. The Latin version is: *In habitu quorumdam displicentium quae aliquando ad purgationem vitae prosunt.*

[2] The "good things" of this life. The translator may have read "filths", for

world and the foul flesh so much, that all our living shall be more beastly and fleshly, than either manly or ghostly.

THE SIXTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

That whoso knoweth not the powers of a soul and the manner of their working may easily be deceived in understanding of ghostly words and of ghostly working; and how a soul is made a god in grace

Lo, ghostly friend! to such wretchedness as thou here mayest see be we fallen through sin. And therefore what wonder is it that we be blindly and lightly deceived in understanding of ghostly words and of ghostly working, and especially those the which know not yet the powers of their souls and the manners of their working?

For ever when the mind is occupied with any bodily thing, be it taken to never so good an end, yet thou art beneath thyself in this working, and without thy soul. And ever when thou feelest thy mind occupied with the subtle conditions of the powers of thy soul and their workings in ghostly things, as be vices or virtues, of thyself or of any creature that is ghostly and even with thee in nature, to that end that thou mightest by this work learn to know thyself and further thy perfection: then thou art within thyself and even with thyself. But ever when thou feelest thy mind occupied with no manner of thing that is bodily or ghostly, but only with the very substance of God, as it is and may be in the proof of the work of this book: then thou art above thyself and beneath thy God.

Above thyself thou art: because thou attainest to come thither by grace, whither thou mayest not come by nature. That is to say, to be oned to God, in spirit and in love and in accordance of will. Beneath thy God thou art: for although it may be said in a manner that in this time God and thou be not two but one in spirit—insomuch that thou or another that feeleth the perfection of this work

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he renders thus: *Alioquin miserabiliter et insolenter ad instar porci volutabit, et in tantum deturpabit se in luto et* sordibus *hujus caduci saeculi et foetore carnis, quod tota vita nostra magis erit bestialis et carnalis quam spiritualis in aliquo vel moralis.*

may, by reason of that onehead, truly be called a god, as Scripture witnesseth[1]—nevertheless thou art beneath him. For he is God by nature without beginning; and thou sometimes wert nought in substance; and afterwards, when thou wert by his might and his love made aught, thou wilfully with sin madest thyself worse than nought. And only by his mercy without thy desert art thou made a god in grace, oned with him in spirit without separation, both here and in the bliss of heaven without any end. So that, although thou be all one with him in grace, yet thou art full far beneath him in nature.

Lo, ghostly friend! hereby mayest thou see somewhat in part that whoso knoweth not the powers of their own soul, and the manner of their working, may full lightly be deceived in understanding of words that be written to ghostly intent. And therefore mayest thou see somewhat the cause why I durst not plainly bid thee show thy desire unto God; but I bade thee childishly to do what in thee is to hide it and cover it. And this I do for fear lest thou shouldst conceive bodily that which is meant ghostly.

THE SIXTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

That nowhere bodily is everywhere ghostly; and how our outer man calleth the work of this book nought

And in the same manner, where another man would bid thee gather thy powers and thy wits wholly within thyself, and worship God there—although he saith full well and full truly; yea! and no man trulier if he be well conceived—yet for fear of deceit and of bodily conceiving of his words, I care not to bid thee so. But thus will I bid thee. Look in nowise that thou be within thyself. And (to speak shortly), I will not that thou be without thyself, nor yet above, nor behind, nor on one side, nor on other.

"Where then," sayest thou, "shall I be? Nowhere, by thy tale!" Now truly thou sayest well; for there would I have thee. For why, nowhere bodily is everywhere ghostly. Look then busily that thy ghostly work be nowhere bodily; and then wheresoever that thing is, on the which thou wilfully workest in thy mind in substance,

[1] Ps. lxxxi. 6; John x. 34: "I said, Ye are gods."

surely there art thou in spirit, as verily as thy body is in that place that thou art in bodily. And although thy bodily wits can find there nothing to feed them on, for they think it nought that thou dost, yea! do on then this nought,[1] provided that thou do it for God's love. And cease not, therefore, but travail busily in that nought with a watchful desire to will to have God, whom no man may know. For I tell thee truly that I had rather be so nowhere bodily, wrestling with that blind nought, than to be so great a lord that I might when I would be everywhere bodily, merrily playing with all this aught as a lord with his own.

Let be this everywhere and this aught, in comparison of this nowhere and this nought. Reck thee never if thy wits cannot understand this nought, for surely I love it much the better. It is so worthy a thing in itself that they cannot understand it. This nought may better be felt than seen; for it is full blind and full dark to them that have but a little while looked thereupon. Nevertheless (if I shall trulier say) a soul is more blinded in feeling of it for abundance of ghostly light, than for any darkness or wanting of bodily light. What is he that calleth it nought? Surely it is our outer man and not our inner. Our inner man calleth it All; for by it he is well taught to understand all things bodily or ghostly, without any special beholding to any one thing by itself.

THE SIXTY-NINTH CHAPTER

How that a man's affection is marvellously changed in the ghostly feeling of this nought, when it is nowhere wrought

WONDERFULLY is a man's affection changed in the ghostly feeling of this nought when it is nowhere wrought. For at the first time that a soul looketh thereupon, it shall find all the special deeds of sin that ever he did since he was born, bodily or ghostly, privily or darkly, painted thereupon. And howsoever he turneth it about, evermore they will appear before his eyes; until the time be that with much hard travail, many sore sighings, and many bitter weepings, he have in great part rubbed them away.

Sometimes in this travail he thinketh that to look thereupon is to

[1] The annotator: *O Nihilum, quam pretiosum!* See Postscript, p. 217.

look as on hell; for he thinketh that he despaireth to win to perfection of ghostly rest out of that pain. Thus far inwards come many; but for greatness of pain that they feel and for lacking of comfort they go back to the consideration of bodily things, seeking fleshly comforts without, for the lacking of ghostly which they have not yet deserved, as they should if they had abided.

For he that abideth feeleth sometimes some comfort, and hath some hope of perfection; for he feeleth and seeth that many of his former special sins be in great part by help of grace rubbed away. Nevertheless ever he feeleth pain; but he thinketh that it shall have an end, for it waxeth ever less and less. And therefore he calleth it not hell but purgatory. Sometimes he can find no special sin written thereupon, but he thinketh that sin is a lump, he knoweth never what, none other thing but himself; and then it may be called the root and the pain of the original sin. Sometimes he thinketh it paradise or heaven, for diverse wonderful sweetnesses and comforts, joys and blessed virtues that he findeth therein. Sometimes he thinketh it God, for peace and rest that he findeth therein.

Yea! think what he think will; for evermore he shall find it a *cloud of unknowing* that is betwixt him and his God.

THE SEVENTIETH CHAPTER

That right as by the failing of our bodily wits we begin most readily to come to the knowing of ghostly things, so by the failing of our ghostly wits we begin most readily to come to the knowledge of God, such as is possible by grace to be had here

And therefore travail fast in this nought, and in this nowhere, and leave thine outward bodily wits and all that they work in: for I tell thee truly that this work may not be conceived by them.[1]

For by thine eyes thou mayest not conceive of anything, unless it be by the length and the breadth, the smallness and the greatness,

[1] This nought and this nowhere, says the annotator, are nothing else than the divine cloud of unknowing.

the roundness and the squareness, the farness and the nearness, and the colour of it. And by thine ears, nought but noise or some manner of sound. By thy nose, nought but either stench or savour. And by thy taste, nought but either sour or sweet, salt or fresh, bitter or pleasant. And by thy feeling, nought but either hot or cold, hard or tender, soft or sharp. And truly neither hath God nor ghostly things none of these qualities nor quantities. And therefore leave thine outward wits, and work not with them, neither within nor without. For all those that set them to be ghostly workers within, and ween that they shall either hear, smell, see, taste, or feel ghostly things, either within them or without, surely they be deceived and work wrong against the course of nature.

For by nature they be ordained that with them men should have knowing of all outward bodily things, and in nowise by them come to the knowing of ghostly things. I mean by their works. By their failings we may, as thus: when we read or hear speak of some certain things, and also conceive that our outward wits cannot tell us by any quality what those things be, then we may be verily certified that those things be ghostly things, and not bodily things.

In this same manner ghostly it fareth within in our ghostly wits when we travail about the knowing of God himself. For have a man never so much ghostly understanding in knowing of all made ghostly things, yet may he never by the work of his understanding come to the knowing of an unmade ghostly thing: the which is nought but God. But by the failing it may. Because that thing that it faileth in is nothing else but only God. And therefore it was that Saint Denis said: *The most godly knowing of God is that which is known by unknowing.*[1] And truly, whoso will look in Denis's books, he shall find that his words will clearly confirm all that I have said or shall say, from the beginning of this treatise to the end. Otherwise than this I care not to cite him, nor any other doctor for me at this time. For once men thought it meekness to say nought of their own heads, unless they confirmed it by Scripture and doctors' words; and now it is turned into curiosity and display of knowledge. For thee it needeth not,[2]

[1] *De divinis nominibus*, cap. vii., § 3 (P.G., iii. 872). The Latin version of Johannes Sarracenus is: *Et est rursus divinissima dei cognitio quae est per ignorantiam cognita.*

[2] The annotator: *quasi idiotae*, as being no clerk.

and therefore I do it not. For whoso hath ears, let him hear, and whoso is stirred to trow, let him trow; for else shall they not.

THE SEVENTY-FIRST CHAPTER

That some may not come to feel the perfection of this work but in time of ravishing, and some may have it when they will, in the common state of man's soul

SOME think this matter so hard and so fearful that they say that it may not be come to without much strong travail coming before, nor conceived but seldom, and that but in the time of ravishing. And to these men will I answer as feebly as I can, and say: that it is all at the ordinance and the disposition of God, according to their ableness in soul that this grace of contemplation and of ghostly working is given to.

For some there be that without much and long ghostly exercise may not come thereto; and yet it shall be but full seldom and in special calling of our Lord that they shall feel the perfection of this work: the which calling is called ravishing. And some there be that be so subtle in grace and in spirit, and so homely[1] with God in this grace of contemplation, that they may have it when they will in the common state of man's soul: as in sitting, going, standing, or kneeling. And yet in this time they have full deliberation of all their wits bodily or ghostly, and may use them if they desire: not without some difficulty, but without great difficulty. Ensample of the first we have in Moses, and of the other in Aaron, the priest of the temple. For this grace of contemplation is figured by the Ark of the Testament in the Old Law, and the workers in this grace be figured by them that most meddled them about this ark, as the story will witness. And well is this grace and this work likened unto that ark. For right as in that ark were contained all the jewels and the relics of the temple, right so in this little love set upon this *cloud of unknowing* be contained all the virtues of man's soul, the which is the ghostly temple of God.

Moses, ere he might come to see this ark and to know how it should be made, clomb with great long travail up to the top of the

[1] Familiar.

mountain, and dwelled there and wrought in a cloud six days: abiding unto the seventh day, that our Lord would vouchsafe to show unto him the manner of this ark-making. By Moses' long travail and his late showing be understood those that may not come to the perfection of this ghostly work without long travail coming before, and yet but full seldom, and when God will vouchsafe to show it.

But that that Moses might not come to see but seldom, and that not without great long travail, Aaron had in his power, because of his office, to see it in the temple within the veil as oft as he liked to enter. And by this Aaron be understood all those the which I spake of above, the which by their ghostly devices, by the help of grace, may attain the perfection of this work as it pleaseth them.[1]

THE SEVENTY-SECOND CHAPTER

That one worker in this work should not judge nor think of another worker as he feeleth in himself

Lo! hereby mayest thou see that he that may not come to see and feel the perfection of this work but by long travail, and yet but seldom, may lightly be deceived if he speak, think, or judge other men as he feeleth in himself: that they may not come to it but seldom, and that not without great travail. And in the same manner may he be deceived that may have it when he will, if he judge all others accordingly: saying that they may have it when they will. Let be this: nay, surely he may not think thus. For peradventure, when it pleaseth God, those that may not have it at the first time but seldom, and that not without great travail, shall afterwards have it when they will, as often as they like. Ensample of this we have in Moses, that at first might not see the manner of the ark but seldom, and that not without great travail in the mount; but afterwards, as often as he liked, saw it in the vale.[2]

[1] Much of this and the two following chapters is from Richard of St Victor, *Benjamin Major*, iv. 22–3, and v. 1 (P.L., cxcvi. 164–9).

[2] Here and in the next chapter there is some confusion, in the MSS. and editions, between "veil" and "vale". Richard of St Victor has *postmodum autem in valle*, and I think "vale," with its antithesis to "mount," is the cor-

THE SEVENTY-THIRD CHAPTER

How that after the likeness of Moses, Beseleel, and Aaron, in their dealings with the Ark of the Testament, we profit on three manners in this grace of contemplation; for this grace is figured in that ark

THREE men there were that most meddled them with this ark of the Old Testament: Moses, Beseleel, and Aaron. Moses learned in the mount of our Lord how it should be made. Beseleel wrought it and made it in the vale, after the ensample that was showed on the mountain. And Aaron had it in his keeping in the temple, to feel it and see it as oft as he liked.

At the likeness of these three, we profit on three manners in this grace of contemplation. Sometime we profit only by grace, and then we be likened unto Moses, that for all the climbing and the travail that he had into the mount, might not come to see it but seldom; and yet was that sight only by the showing of our Lord when he liked to show it, and not for any desert of his travail. Sometime we profit in this grace by our own ghostly craft, helped with grace, and then we be likened to Beseleel, the which could not see the ark before he had made it by his own travail, helped by the ensample that was showed unto Moses in the mount. And sometimes we profit in this grace by other men's teaching, and then we be likened to Aaron, the which had it in keeping and in custom to see and feel the ark when he pleased, that Beseleel had wrought and made ready before to his hands.

Lo! ghostly friend, in this work, though it be childishly and lewdly[1] spoken, I bear, though I be a wretch unworthy to teach any creature, the office of Beseleel: making and declaring in a manner to thy hands the manner of this ghostly ark. But far better, and more worthily than I do, thou mayest work if thou wilt be Aaron; that is to say, continually working therein for thee and for me. Do then so, I pray thee, for the love of God Almighty. And since we be both

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rect reading. The Latin version has here the rather vague *in diversis locis*, but in the next chapter *in valle*.

[1] Ignorantly, foolishly.

called by God to work in this work, I beseech thee for God's love to fulfil on thy part what is lacking on mine.[1]

THE SEVENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

How that the matter of this book is never read or spoken, nor heard read or spoken, by a soul disposed thereto, without the feeling of a very accordance to the effect of the same work; and a rehearsing of the same charge that is written in the Prologue

And if thou thinkest that this manner of working be not according to thy disposition in body and in soul, thou mayest leave it and take another, safely with good ghostly counsel without blame. And then I beseech thee that thou wilt hold me excused: for truly I would have profited unto thee in this writing according to my simple knowledge, and that was mine intent. And therefore read it over twice or thrice; and ever the oftener the better, and the more shalt thou understand thereof. Insomuch, peradventure, that some sentence that was full hard to thee at the first or the second reading, soon after thou shalt think it easy.

Yea! and it seemeth impossible to mine understanding that any soul that is disposed to this work should read it or speak it, or else hear it read or spoken, without that same soul feeling for that time a very accordance to the effect of this work. And then, if thou thinkest it doth thee good, thank God heartily, and for God's love pray for me.

Do then so. And I pray thee for God's love that thou let none see this book, unless it be such a one as thou thinkest is apt for the book; according as thou findest written in the book before, where it telleth what men and when they should work in this work. And if thou shalt let any such men see it, then I pray thee that thou bid them take them time to look it all over. For peradventure there is some matter therein, in the beginning or in the middle, the which is hanging and not fully declared where it standeth. But if it be not

[1] This chapter borrows largely from Richard of St Victor (*Benjamin Major*, v. 1), even to the sentence: *Ecce nos in hoc opere quasi Beseleel officiu suscepimus.*

there, it is soon after, or else in the end. And thus if a man saw one part and not another, peradventure he might lightly be led into error: and therefore I pray thee to do as I tell thee. And if thou thinkest that there be any matter therein that thou wouldst have more opened than it is, let me know which it is and thy opinion thereupon; and according to my simple knowledge it shall be amended if I can.[1]

But as for worldly praters, flatterers and blamers, whisperers and tale-bearers, and all manner of carpers, I desire not that they should see this book; for it was never mine intent to write such thing for them. And therefore I would not that they heard it, neither they nor none of those curious learned nor unlearned men: yea! although they be full good men in active living: for it accordeth not to them.

THE SEVENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

Of some certain tokens by the which a man may prove whether he be called by God to work in this work

All those that read the matter of this book, or hear it read or spoken, and in this reading or hearing think it a good and a pleasing thing, be not therefore called by God to work in this work, only for this liking stirring that they feel in the time of this reading. For peradventure this stirring cometh more from a natural curiosity of wit than from any calling of grace.

But if they will prove whence this stirring cometh, they may prove it thus, if they like. First let them look if they have done what in them is before, abling them thereto by cleansing their conscience, according to the law of Holy Church and the advice of their counsel. If it be thus, it is so far well. But if they would know more nearly, let them look if this stirring evermore press in their mind more habitually than any other ghostly exercise. And if they think that there is no manner of thing that they do, bodily or ghostly, that is sufficiently done with witness of their conscience, unless this secret little love set upon the *cloud of unknowing* be in a ghostly manner the chief of all their work: and if they thus feel—then it is

[1] The disciple accepted this offer, hence the *Epistle of Privy Counsel*. So the annotator.

a token that they be called by God to this work; and surely else not.

I say not that this stirring shall ever last and dwell in all their minds continually, who be called to work in this work. Nay, so is it not. For from a young ghostly prentice in this work, the actual feeling thereof is ofttimes withdrawn for divers reasons. Sometime, so that he shall not presume thereupon, and ween that it be in great part in his own power, to have it when he liketh and as he liketh. And such a weening were pride. And evermore when the feeling of grace is withdrawn, pride is the cause: that is to say, not actual pride, but pride that should be, were it not that this feeling of grace were withdrawn. And thus ween ofttimes some young fools that God is their enemy; when he is their full friend.

Sometimes it is withdrawn for their recklessness; and when it is thus, they feel soon afterwards a full bitter pain that biteth them full sore. Sometimes our Lord will delay it on purpose, because he will by such delaying make it grow and be more esteemed, when it is new found and felt again that long had been lost. And this is one of the readiest and sovereignest tokens that a soul may have, in order to learn whether he be called or not to work in this work: if he feel, after such a delaying and a long lacking of this work, that when it cometh suddenly as it doth—not purchased by any means—that he hath then a greater fervour of desire and a greater love-longing to work in this work than ever he had any before. Insomuch, that ofttimes, I trow, he hath more joy in the finding thereof than ever he had sorrow in the losing.

And if it be thus, surely it is a true token without error that he is called by God to work in this work, whatsoever that he be or hath been.

For not what thou art, nor what thou hast been, doth God regard with his merciful eyes; but what thou wouldst be. And Saint Gregory witnesseth that *all holy desires grow by delays; and if they wane by delays, then were they never holy desires.*[1] For if a man feeleth ever less and less joy in new findings and sudden presentations of his purposed desires, although they may be called natural desires of the good, nevertheless holy desires were they never. Of this holy desire

[1] *Homiliae in Evangelia*, lib. ii., hom. 25: *Sancta enim desideria, ut praediximus, dilatione crescunt. Si autem dilatione deficiunt, desideria non fuerunt* (P.L., lxxvi. 1190).

speaketh Saint Austin and saith, that *all the life of a good Christian man is nought else but holy desire.*[1]

Farewell, ghostly friend, in God's blessing and mine! And I beseech Almighty God that true peace, whole counsel, and ghostly comfort in God with abundance of grace, evermore be with thee and all God's lovers on earth. Amen.

[1] *In Epist. Joannis*, tr. 4; P.L., xxxv., col. 2008: *Tota vita christiani boni sanctum desiderium est.*

HERE ENDETH THE CLOUD OF UNKNOWING

II. HERE FOLLOWETH THE EPISTLE OF PRIVY COUNSEL[1]

[1] The oldest MSS. call this tract variously *Book*, *Treatise*, *Epistle*. For *Counsel* Harleian 674 has *Counseling*. Dr Hodgson adopts *The Book of Privy Counselling*. The Douce MS. 262 (c. 1500) introduces it in this way: "Here followeth the Epistle of Private Counsel, the which dependeth upon the Cloud and of the self Cloud's making, much profitable to contemplative men intending to come to divine love." There is a similar title in the Ampleforth MS. The chapters and chapter headings of the *Epistle* derive from the present editor.

HERE BEGINNETH THE PROLOGUE

GHOSTLY friend in God: as touching thine inward occupation as methinketh thee disposed, I speak at this time in special to thyself, and not to all those that this writing shall hear in general. For if I should write unto all, then must I write a thing that were according to all generally. But since at this time I shall write to thee in special, therefore I write none other thing but such as methinketh is most speedful and according to thy disposition only. If any other be disposed as thou art, to whom this writing may profit as unto thee, so much the better, I am well pleased. Nevertheless, at this time thine own inward disposition is only by itself, as I may conceive it, the point and the prick of my beholding. And therefore to thee, in person of all other like unto thee, I say thus.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

That this work is a striving towards God, wherein a man offers himself to God, being to being, without curious seeking in the qualities of his being or of God's

WHEN thou comest by thyself think not before what thou shalt do after, but forsake as well good thoughts as evil thoughts. And pray not with thy mouth, unless thou likest right well. And then, if thou aught shall say, look not how much nor how little that it be, nor weigh not what it is, nor what it meaneth, be it orison, be it psalm, hymn, or anthem, or any other prayer, general or special, mental within endited by thought, or vocal without by pronouncing of word. And look that nothing remain in thy working mind but a naked intent stretching unto God, not clothed in any special thought of God, in himself, how he is in himself, or in any of his works, but only that he is as he is. Let him be so, I pray thee, and make him on no otherwise. Seek no further in him by subtlety of wit; let that belief be thy ground. This naked intent, freely fastened and grounded in very belief, shall be nought else to thy thought and to thy feeling but a naked thought and a blind feeling of thine own being, as

if thou saidst thus unto God within thy meaning: "That that I am, Lord, I offer unto thee, without any looking to any quality of thy being, but only that thou art as thou art, without any more."

Let that meek darkness be thy mirror and thy mind wholly. Think no further of thyself than I bid thee do of thy God, so that thou be one with him in spirit as thus, without any separating and scattering of mind. For he is thy being, and in him thou art what thou art, not only by cause and by being, but also he is in thee both thy cause and thy being. And therefore think of God in this work as thou dost on thyself, and on thyself as thou dost on God: that he is as he is and thou art as thou art, so that thy thought be not scattered nor separated, but oned in him that is all; evermore saving this difference betwixt thee and him, that he is thy being and thou not his. For though it be so that all things be in him by cause and by being, and he be in all things their cause and their being, yet in himself only he is his own cause and his own being. For as nothing may be without him, so may he not be without himself. He is being both to himself and to all. And in that only is he separated from all, that he is being both of himself and of all. And in that is he one in all and all in him, that all things have their being in him, as he is the being of all.[1]

Thus shall thy thought and thy feeling be oned with him in grace without separation, all curious seeking in the quaint qualities of thy blind being or of his far put back. So that thy thought be naked and thy feeling nothing defouled, and thou, nakedly as thou art, with the touching of grace be privily fed in thy feeling only with him as he is; but blindly and in part, as it may be here in this life, so that thy longing desire be evermore working.

Look up then lightly and say to thy Lord, either with mouth or meaning of heart: "That that I am, Lord, I offer unto thee; for thou it art." And think nakedly, plainly, and boisterously, that thou art as thou art, without any manner of curiosity.

This is little mastery for to think, if it were bidden to the lewdest[2] man or woman that liveth in the commonest natural wit in this life, as methinketh. And therefore softly, and mourningly, and

[1] See the *Cloud* (Chap. 67) on the nature of the union of the soul with God.

[2] Lewd=ignorant, unlearned.

smilingly I marvel me sometimes when I hear some men say—I mean not simple lewd men and women, but clerks and men of great knowledge—that my writing to thee and to others is so hard and so high, so curious and so quaint,[1] that scarcely it may be conceived of the subtlest clerk or witted man or woman in this life, as they say. But to these men must I answer and say that it is much worthy to be sorrowed, and of God and his lovers to be mercifully scorned and bitterly condemned, that now on these days, not only a few folks but generally almost all—except it be one or two in a country of the special chosen of God—be so blind in their curious knowledge of learning and of nature that the true conceit of this light work, through the which the most simple man's soul or woman's in this life is verily in lovely meekness oned to God in perfect charity, may no more, nor yet so much, be conceived of them in certainty of spirit, for their blindness and their curiosity, than may the knowledge of the greatest clerk in the schools of a young child that is at his A.B.C. And for this blindness erringly they call such simple teaching curiosity of wit, when, if it be well looked upon, it shall be found but a simple and a light lesson of a lewd man.

For I hold him too lewd and too simple that cannot think and feel that himself is—not what himself is, but that himself is. For this is plainly proper to the lewdest cow, or to the most unreasonable beast—if it might be said, as it may not, that one were lewder or more unreasonable than another—for to feel their own proper being. Much more then is it proper to man, the which is singularly endued with reason above all other beasts, for to think and for to feel his own proper being.

And therefore come down into the lowest point of thy wit, the which some man holdeth by very proof that it is the highest, and think on the simplest manner, but by some man the wisest, not what thyself is, but that thyself is. For why, for thee for to think what thou art in all properties needeth much craft of learning and of knowledge, and much subtle seeking in thy natural wits. And this hast thou done now many a day with help of grace, so that thou knowest now in part, and as I suppose it is profitable to thee for the time, what thou art: a man by nature, and a foul stinking wretch by sin, thou knowest well how. And peradventure thou

[1] Ingenious, clever.

thinkest sometimes too well all the filths that follow and fall to a wretch. Fie on them! Let them go, I pray thee! Stir no further in them for fear of stink. But for to think that thou art, this mayest thou have of thy ignorance and thy simplicity without any great knowledge of learning or of nature.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

After what manner a man should offer his being to God; and, in particular, that he should cease from busy meditations

And therefore, I pray thee, do no more now in this case; but think simply that thou art as thou art, be thou never so foul nor so wretched, so that thou have beforetimes (as I suppose that thou hast) been lawfully amended of all thy sins in special and in general, after the true counsel of Holy Church. For else shalt thou never, nor any other by my consent, be so bold as to take upon you this work. But if thou feel that thou hast done what in thee is, then shalt thou set thee to this work. And although thou feel thyself yet then so vile and so wretched, that for cumbrance of thyself thou knowest not thyself what is best for thee to do with thyself, this then shalt thou do as I bid thee.

Take good, gracious God as he is, plat[1] and plain as a plaster, and lay it to thy sick self as thou art. Or, if I shall say otherwise, bear up thy sick self as thou art and try for to touch by desire good, gracious God as he is, the touching of whom is endless health, by witness of the woman in the Gospel, saying thus: *Si tetigero vel fimbriam vestimenti ejus, salva ero.* "If I touch but the hem of his clothing, I shall be safe."[2] Much more shalt thou then be made whole of thy sickness by this high heavenly touching of his own being. Step up then stoutly and taste of that treacle.[3] Bear up thy sick self as thou art unto gracious God as he is, without any curious or special beholding to any of all the qualities that belong to the being of thyself or of God, whether they be clean or wretched, gracious or natural, godly or manly.[4] It mattereth not now to thee, but that thy blind beholding of thy naked being be gladly borne up in listiness of love, to be

[1] Flat. [2] Matt. ix. 21. [3] Medicine, antidote.
[4] Human.

knitted and oned in grace and in spirit to the precious being of God in himself only as he is, without more.

And although thy wanton seeking wits can find no meat unto them in this manner of doing, and therefore grumblingly they will bid thee always to leave off that work and do some good on their curious manner—for it seemeth to them that it is nothing worth what thou dost, and all is because they have no skill therein—yet I would love it the better; for by that it seemeth that it is more worthy than they be. And why should I not then love it the better, and especially when there is no work that I may do, nor that may be wrought in the curiosity of any of my wits, bodily or ghostly, that might bring me so nigh unto God and so far from the world, as this naked little feeling and offering up of my blind being would do?

And therefore, although thy wits can find no meat unto them in this work, and therefore they would have thee away: yet look that thou leave not for them, but be thou their master and go not back in feeding of them, be they never so mad. Then goest thou back in feeding of thy wits when thou sufferest them to seek in the diverse curious meditations of the qualities of thy being. The which meditations, although they be sometimes full good and full profitable, nevertheless, in comparison of this blind feeling and offering up of thy being, they be full diverse and scattering from the perfection of onehead, the which should be betwixt God and thy soul. And therefore hold thee before in the first point of thy spirit, which is thy being. And go not back for no kind of thing, seem it never so good, nor so holy, the thing that thy wits would lead thee unto.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

That this work is enjoined by Scripture; and that in it all duties, and especially that of charity, be fully performed

And fulfil the counsel and the teaching of Solomon, saying thus to his son: *Honora Dominum de tua substantia et de primitiis frugum tuarum da pauperibus; et implebuntur horrea tua saturitate et vino torcularia tua redundabunt.* "Worship thy Lord with thy substance, and with the first of thy fruits feed thou the poor, and thy barns shall be

filled with fulness, and thy presses shall run over with wine."[1] This is the text that Solomon spoke to his son bodily, as if he had said to thine understanding, as I shall say in his person unto thee ghostly: "Thou ghostly friend in God, look that, leaving all curious seeking in thy natural wits, thou do whole worship to thy Lord God with thy substance, offering up unto him plainly and wholly thine own self, all that thou art and such as thou art, but generally and not specially—that is, without special beholding[2] to that that thou art —so that thy sight be not scattered nor thy feeling defouled, the which would make thee less one with thy God in purity of spirit. And with the first of thy fruits feed thou the poor—that is, with the first of thy ghostly or bodily qualities, the which be grown up with thee from the first beginning of thy making unto this day."

All the gifts of nature and of grace that ever God gave thee, I call them thy fruits, with the which thou art bound to foster and feed in this life, both bodily and ghostly, as well all thy brethren and sisters in nature and in grace, as thou art thine own proper self. The first of these gifts I call the first of thy fruits. The first gift in each creature is only the being of that same creature. For, though it be so that the qualities of thy being be so fast oned with the same being as they be without separation, yet because they hang all upon it, verily it may be called, as it is, the first of thy gifts. And thus it is only thy being that is the first of thy fruits. For if thou spread out the curious beholding of thine heart to any or to all the subtle qualities and the worthy conditions that pertain to the being of man—the which is the noblest being of all made things—evermore thou shalt find that the first point and the prick of thy beholding, whatsoever it be, is thy naked being. As if thou saidst thus in thyself in each one of thy beholdings, stirring thyself by the means of this beholding to the love and to the praising of thy Lord God—that not only gave thee to be, but so nobly to be, as the qualities of thy being will witness in thy beholding—saying thus: "I am and see and feel that I am. And not only I am, but so I am, and so, and so, and so, and so," reckoning up in thy beholding all the qualities of thy being in special. And then—that more than all this is—lap up all this in general and say

[1] Prov. iii. 9, 10. This is the Communion verse of the Mass for the eleventh Sunday after Pentecost (Sarum, eleventh after Trinity).

[2] Consideration, regard.

thus: "That that I am and how that I am, as in nature and in grace, all I have it of thee, Lord, and thou it art. And all I offer it unto thee principally to the praising of thee, for the help of all mine even Christians and of me." And thus mayest thou see that the first and the point of thy beholding is most substantially set in the naked sight and the blind feeling of thine own being. And thus it is only thy being that is the first of thy fruits.

But although it be the first of all thy fruits, and although the other fruits hang all upon it, yet it profiteth not now in this case to lap nor to clothe thy beholding of it in any or in all the curious qualities of it, the which I call thy fruits and in which thou hast been travailed before this time. But it sufficeth now unto thee to do whole worship unto God with thy substance, and for to offer up thy naked being, the which is the first of thy fruits, in continual sacrifice of praising of God, both for thyself and for all others, as charity asketh; not clothed with any quality or special beholding that on any manner pertaineth or may pertain to the being of thyself or of any other, as if thou wouldst by that beholding help the need, further the speed, or increase the profit to perfection, of thyself or of any other. Let be this! It will not be thus in this case truly. For it profiteth more—such a blind common beholding—to the need, the speed, and the perfection of thyself and of all other in purity of spirit, than any special beholding that any man may have, seem it never so holy.

This is truth by witness of Scripture, by example of Christ, and by quick reason. For as all men were lost in Adam, because he fell from this oneing affection, and as all, that with work according to their calling will witness their will of salvation, be saved and shall be by the virtue of the passion of only Christ, offering himself up in veriest sacrifice, all that he was in general and not in special, without special beholding to any one man in this life, but generally and in common for all: right so a very and a perfect sacrificer of himself, thus by a common intent unto all, doth that in him is to knit all men to God as effectually as himself is. And more charity may no man do than thus to sacrifice himself for all his brethren and sisters in grace and in nature.[1]

[1] See the parallel passage in the *Cloud*, Chap. 25. The reader will notice in the *Epistle*, apart from its identical teaching, many verbal parallels to the

For as the soul is more worthy than the body, so the knitting of the soul to God (the life of it) by the heavenly food of charity is better than the knitting of the body to the soul (the life of it) by any earthly food in this life. This is good for to do by itself, but without the other it is never well done. This and the other is the better; but the other by itself is the best. For this by itself deserveth never salvation; but the other by itself (where the plenty of this faileth) deserveth not only salvation, but leadeth to the greatest perfection.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

That one who is in this work needeth not any particular consideration of the qualities of himself or of God

For it needeth not now to the increasing of thy perfection to go back in feeding of thy wits, as it is in beholding of the qualities of thy being, so that thou mightest by such beholding feed and fill thine affection with lovely and liking feelings in God and in ghostly things, and thine understanding with ghostly wisdom of holy meditations in seeking after the knowing of God. For if thou wilt hold thee busily (as thou mayest by grace) evermore continually in the first point of thy spirit, offering up unto God that naked blind feeling of thine own being, the which I call the first of thy fruits: be thou sure that the other hinder part of Solomon's lesson shall be full verily fulfilled, as he promiseth, without business of thyself in curious seeking and ransacking with thy ghostly wits among any of the qualities that belong, not only to the being of thyself, but also to the being of God.

For know thou right well, that in this work thou shalt have no more beholding to the qualities of the being of God than to the qualities of the being of thyself. For there is no name, nor feeling, nor beholding more, nor so much, according unto everlastingness (the which is God), as is that the which may be had, seen, and felt in the blind and the lovely beholding of this word *is*. For if thou say: "Good" or "Fair Lord" or "Sweet", "Merciful" or "Righteous",

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language of the *Cloud*, which would seem to put the common authorship of the two works beyond doubt.

"Wise" or "All-witting", "Mighty" or "All-mighty", "Wit" or "Wisdom", "Might" or "Strength", "Love" or "Charity", or what other such thing that thou say of God: all it is hid and enstored in this little word *is*. For that same is to him only to be, that is all these for to be.[1] And if thou add a hundred thousand such sweet words as these: good, fair, and all these other, yet went thou not from this little word *is*. And if thou say them all, thou addest not to it. And if thou say right none, thou takest not from it. And therefore be as blind in the lovely beholding of the being of thy God as in the naked beholding of the being of thyself, without any curious seeking in thy wits to look after any quality that belongeth to his being or to thine. But, all curiosity left and far put back, do worship to thy God with thy substance, all that thou art as thou art, unto all him that is as he is, the which only of himself without more is the blissful being both of himself and of thee.

And thus shalt thou knittingly, and in a manner that is marvellous, worship God with himself. For, that that thou art thou hast it of him and he it is. And although thou hadst a beginning in thy substantial creation—the which was sometime nought—yet hath thy being been evermore in him without beginning and ever shall be without ending, as himself is. And therefore oft I cry and ever upon one: "Do worship to thy God with thy substance and common profit unto all that be men with the first of thy fruits. And then shall thy barns be fulfilled with fulness." That is, then shall thy ghostly affections be filled with the fulness of love and of virtuous delight in God, thy ground and thy purity of spirit. "And thy presses shall run over with wine." That is, thine inward ghostly wits, the which thou art wont to strain and press together by divers curious meditations and reasonable investigations about the ghostly knowing of God and of thyself, in beholding of his qualities and of thine, shall run over with wine. By the which wine in Holy Scripture is verily and mistily[2] understood ghostly wisdom in very contemplation and high savour of the Godhead.

And all this shall be done suddenly, listily, and graciously, without business or travail of thyself, only by the ministration of angels,

[1] *Eo quod est, est omne quod est*. The attributes of God are identical with his essence.

[2] Symbolically, mystically.

through the virtue of this lovely blind work. For unto it all angel's knowing doth special service, as the maiden unto the lady.[1]

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

That in this work the eternal wisdom, the Word of God, descendeth into man's soul and uniteth it to himself; and of the good effects that follow

In great commendation of this sweet subtle working, the which in itself is the high wisdom of the Godhead graciously descending into man's soul, knitting it and oneing it unto himself in ghostly subtlety and prudence of spirit, the wise man Solomon bursteth up and saith: *Beatus homo qui invenit sapientiam et qui affluit prudentia. Melior est acquisitio ejus negotiatione auri et argenti. Primi et purissimi fructus ejus. Custodi, fili mi, legem atque consilium; et erit vita animae tuae et gratia faucibus tuis. Tunc ambulabis fiducialiter in via tua, et pes tuus non impinget. Si dormieris, non timebis; quiesces, et suavis erit somnus tuus. Ne paveas repentino terrore, et irruentes tibi potentias impiorum. Quia Dominus erit in latere tuo et custodiet pedem tuum ne capiaris.*[2] All this is to thine understanding thus: He is a blissful man that may find this oneing wisdom and that may abound in his ghostly working with this lovely subtlety and prudence of spirit, in offering up of his own blind feeling of his own being, all curious knowledge of learning and of nature far put back. The purchasing of this ghostly wisdom and of this subtle working is better than the getting of gold or of silver. By the which gold and silver is morally understood all other bodily and ghostly knowing, the which is gotten by curious seeking and working in our natural wits, beneath us, within us, or even with us, in beholding of any of the qualities that belong to the being of God or of any created thing. And why is it better, he addeth the cause and saith, for *primi et purissimi fructus ejus*. That is, for "first and purest be the fruits of it." And no wonder; for why, the fruit of this working is high ghostly wisdom, suddenly and freely raised of the spirit inwardly in itself and unformed, full far from fantasy, impossible to be strained or to fall under the working of natural wit.

[1] Cf. Ps. cxxii. 2: *Sicut oculi ancillae in manibus dominae suae. . .*

[2] Prov. iii. 13–14, 21–6.

The which natural wit, be it never so subtle nor so holy, may be called (in comparison of this) but feigned folly formed in fantasy, as far from the very certainty when the ghostly sun shineth, as the darkness of the moonshine in a mist at midwinter's night from the brightness of the sunbeam in the clearest time of midsummer day.

"Keep, my son," he saith, "this law and this counsel," in the which all the commandments and the counsels, as well of the Old Testament as of the New, be verily and perfectly fulfilled, without any special beholding to any one singularly in itself. And on otherwise is not this manner of working called a law but for it containeth in it fully all the branches and the fruits of the law. For if it be wisely looked, the ground and the strength of this working shall be seen nought else but the glorious gift of love, in the which by the teaching of the Apostle all the law is fulfilled: *Plenitudo legis est dilectio*, "the fulness of the law is love."[1]

And this lovely law and this lively counsel, if thou keep it, as Solomon saith, "shall be life to thy soul": within in softness of love to thy God, "and grace to thy cheeks" without, in the truest teaching and the seemliest governance of thy bodily bearing in outward form of living to thine even Christian. And in these two, the one within and the other without, by the teaching of Christ, "hangeth all the law and the prophets":[2] *in his enim duobus mandatis tota lex pendet et prophetae: scilicet, dilectio Dei et proximi*. And therefore when thou art made thus perfect in thy working, both within and without, then shalt thou go trustily grounded in grace, the guide of thy ghostly way, lovely[3] lifting up thy naked blind being to the blissful being of thy God, the which be but one in grace, although they be diverse in nature.

"And the foot of thy love shall not stumble." That is to say, from the time that thou hast gotten the proof of thy ghostly work in continuance of spirit, then shalt thou not so lightly be letted and drawn back by the curious questions of thy subtle wits, as thou art now in the beginning. Or else thus: Then shall the foot of thy love neither stumble nor trip on any manner of fantasy caused by thy curious seeking in thy wits. For why, utterly in this work (as it is said before) is all curious seeking in any of thy natural wits far put back and fully forgotten, for fear of fantasy or any feigned falsehood

[1] Rom. xiii. 10. [2] Matt. xxii. 40. [3] Lovingly.

that may fall in this life, the which in this work might defoul thy naked feeling of thy blind being and draw thee away from the worthiness of this work.

For if any manner of special thought of anything but only of thy naked being—the which is thy God[1] and thine intent—come to thy mind, then art thou away and drawn back to work in the subtlety, and in the curiosity of thy wits, in scattering and separating of thee and of thy mind both from thee and from thy God. And therefore hold thee whole and unscattered, as far forth as thou mayest by grace and by subtlety of ghostly continuance. For in this blind beholding of thy naked being thus oned to God, as I tell thee, shalt thou do all that thou shalt do: eat and drink, sleep and wake, go and sit, speak and be still, lie and rise, stand and kneel, run and ride, travail and rest. This shalt thou each day offer up unto God as for the most precious offering that thou canst make. And it shall be the chief of all thy doings, and in all thy doings, whether they be active or contemplative. For as Solomon saith in this passage: "If thou sleep" in this blind beholding from all the noise and the stirring of the fell fiend, the false world, and the frail flesh, "thou shalt not dread any peril," nor any deceit of the fiend. For why, utterly in this work he is mazed and made blind in a painful unknowing and a mad wondering to know what thou dost. But no matter thereof, for "thou shalt graciously rest" in this lovely onehead of God and thy soul; "and thy sleep shall be full soft," for it shall be ghostly food and inward strength, as well to thy body as to thy soul.

As this Solomon saith soon after: *Universae carni sanitas est.* "It is health to all the frailty and the sickness of the flesh."[2] And worthily. For since all sickness and corruption did fall to the flesh when the soul fell from this work, therefore shall all health come to the flesh when the soul by the grace of Jesu—the which is the chief worker—riseth to this same work again. And this shalt thou hope only to have by the mercy of Jesu and thy lovely consent. And therefore I pray thee with Solomon here in this passage that thou stand stoutly in this work, evermore bearing up unto him thy lovely consent in gladness of love.

Et ne paveas repentino terrore et irruentes tibi potentias impiorum. And

[1] In the sense explained in the first chapter. See also the *Cloud*, Chap. 67.
[2] Prov. iv. 22.

be not astonied[1] with any unrestful dread, though the fiend (as he will) come with a sudden fearsomeness, pushing and beating on the walls of thy house where thou sittest; or though he stir any of his mighty limbs[2] to rise and to run in upon thee suddenly as it is without any warning. Thus shall it be, know thou right well, that whatsoever thou be that settest thee to work truly in this work, thou shalt verily see and feel, or else smell, taste or hear, some astonying made by the fiend in some of thy five wits without. And all is done for to draw thee down from the height of this precious working. And therefore take good care of thine heart in the time of this torment, and lean with a trusty listiness to the love of our Lord. *Quia Dominus erit in latere tuo, et custodiet pedem tuum ne capiaris.* That is, "For our Lord shall be in thy side ready and nigh to thine help, and he shall keep thy foot (that is, the ascending of thy love by the which thou goest to God) so that thou shalt not be taken by no subtlety nor guile of thine enemies," the fiend and his followers, the world and thy flesh. Lo! friend, thus shall our Lord and our Love, mightily, wisely, and goodly succour, keep, and defend all those that for lovely trust that they feel in him will utterly forsake the keeping of themselves.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

That the soul must give itself wholly to God, who will provide for it; with a warning to those that would censure this work

But where shall such a soul be found, so freely fastened and founded in the faith, so fully meeked in noughting of itself and so lovely led and fed in the love of our Lord, with full knowing and feeling of his almighty-hood, his unknown wisdom, and his glorious goodness: how he is one in all and all in him, insomuch that without full yielding up unto him all that of him is, by him and in him, a loving soul is never more verily meeked in full noughting of itself? So that for this noble noughting of itself in very meekness, and this high alling of God in perfect charity, it deserveth to have God—in whose love it is deeply drenched in full and final forsaking of itself as

[1] Affrighted. [2] Agents—i.e., the devils.

nought and less, if less might be—mightily, wisely and goodly succouring it, keeping it, and defending it from all adversities bodily and ghostly without business or travail, regard or care of itself.

Let be your manly objections, ye half-meeked souls, and say not in your reasonable tracing[1] that such a meek and an utter forsaking of the keeping of a man's own self (when he feeleth him thus touched by grace) is any tempting of God, because ye feel in your reason that ye dare not do so yourselves. No, hold you content with your part, for it sufficeth to the saving of your souls in active degree. And let other contemplative souls alone that dare. And muse ye not, and marvel ye not of their words and of their works, although ye think them passing the course and the common judgement of your reason. Oh, for shame! How oft shall ye read and hear, and neither give faith nor credence thereto? I mean the thing that all our old Fathers have written and taught before us, and the thing which is the flower and the fruit of all Holy Scripture. Either it seemeth that ye be blind and may not with belief see what ye read and hear; or else ye be touched with some privy spice[2] of envy, that ye may not trust so great good to fall to your brethren because ye lack it yourselves. It is good that ye beware! For your enemy is subtle, and is in purpose to make you give more faith to your own wit than to old teaching of true Fathers, or to the working of grace and the will of our Lord.

How oft have ye read and heard, and of how many both holy, wise, and true, that as soon as Benjamin was born his mother Rachel died? By Benjamin contemplation, and by Rachel we understand reason. And as soon as a soul is touched with very contemplation—as it is in this noble noughting of itself and this high alling of God—surely and verily right then dieth all man's reason. And since ye read this so oft, not only of one or of two, but of full many, full holy and full worthy, why believe ye not it? And if ye believe it, how dare ye then ransack and seek within your reason in the words and the deeds of Benjamin? By the which Benjamin be understood all those that in excess of love be ravished above mind, the prophet saying thus: *Ibi Benjamin adolescentulus in mentis excessu.*[3] That is to

[1] Rational estimation. [2] Species, kind.

[3] Ps. lxvii. 28. The allegory in this paragraph is from Richard of St Victor, who regards Benjamin as the type of ecstatic love. Hence the titles

say, "There is Benjamin, a young child, in excess of mind." Look therefore that ye be not like to those wretched women in body that kill their own children when they be new born. It is good ye beware! And set not the point of your presumptuous spear at the might, the wit, and the will of our Lord, stoutly in that that in you is, and for blindness and lacking of experience, as ye would bear him down when ye ween best to hold him up.

For since, in the first beginning of Holy Church, in time of persecution, divers souls and many were so marvellously touched in suddenness of grace that suddenly, without means of other works coming before, men of crafts did cast down their instruments from their hands, and children their tables in the school, and did run without ransacking of reason to the martyrdom with saints:[1] why shall not men trow now, in the time of peace, that God may, can, and will, and doth—yea! touch divers souls as suddenly with the grace of contemplation? And this I trow he will do full graciously in chosen souls. For he will worthily be known in the end, to the wondering of all the world. For such a soul, thus lovely noughting itself and thus highly alling his God, shall full graciously be kept from all casting down by his ghostly or bodily enemies, without business or travail of itself, only by the goodness of God. As the godly reason asketh, that he truly keep all those that for business about his love forsake and care not to keep themselves. And no wonder that they be marvellously kept, for they be so fully meeked in boldness and strength of love.

And whoso dare not do this and saith against this, either the devil is in his breast and reaveth from him the love-trust that he should have to his God and the good will that he should have to his even Christian, or else he is not yet as perfectly meeked as he needeth to be, I mean if he purpose to that life that is truly contemplative. And

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of his two chief mystical treatises. *Benjamin Minor* begins with this verse.

[1] Cf. *Martyrologium Romanum*, 6 August. Justus and Pastor, brothers and schoolboys at Alcalá, fired by zeal to share the fate of their fellow Christians, cast away their school-books and ran to the place of martyrdom. They were scourged and beheaded. Our author keeps close to the wording of the Martyrology, which begins as follows: *Compluti, in Hispania, sanctorum Martyrum Justi et Pastoris, qui, cum adhuc pueri litteris imbuerentur, sponte ad martyrium, projectis in schola tabulis, cucurrerunt. . .*

therefore be thou not abashed thus to be meeked to thy Lord, nor thus for to sleep in this blind beholding of God as he is, for all the noise of this wicked world, the false fiend, and thy frail flesh. For our Lord shall be ready to help thee and keep thy foot that thou be not taken.[1]

And well is this work likened to a sleep. For as in a sleep the use of the bodily wits is ceased, that the body may take his full rest in feeding and strengthening of the bodily nature: right so in this ghostly sleep the wanton questions of the wild ghostly wits, imaginative reasons, be fast bound and utterly voided, so that the silly[2] soul may softly sleep and rest in the lovely beholding of God as he is, in full feeding and strengthening of the ghostly nature. And therefore bind in thy wits in offering up of this naked blind feeling of thine own being, and look ever (as oft I say) that it be naked and not clad with any quality of thy being. For if thou clothe it with any quality, as with the worthiness of thy being, or with any other privy condition that pertaineth to the being of man, forby the being of any other creature: then as fast thou givest meat to thy wits, by the which they have occasion and strength to draw thee to many things and to be scattered thou knowest not how. Beware of this deceit, I pray thee.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

That this work is perfection, as witnessed by the virtues which accompany it; and that we pursue it at the call and with the grace of God

But now, peradventure, at the subtle examination of thy curious wits, because they have no skill in this work, thou marvellest thee in a manner at this work and hast it in suspect. And that is no wonder. For thou hast been yet hitherto over wise in thy wits to come to any skill of any such doing. And, peradventure, thou askest in thine heart how thou shouldst know whether this work were pleasing to God or not; or, if it be pleasing, how it may be that it is so pleasing as I say that it is. To this I answer and say that this question is moved

[1] See the *Cloud*, Chap 23, where some of this occurs in the same words.
[2] Blessed.

of a curious wit, the which will on no wise let thee consent to this work ere the time be that there be made satisfaction to the curiosity thereof by some fair reason. And therefore shall I not refuse, but I shall in part make me like to thee, favouring thy proud wit, that thou be afterward like unto me, following my counsel without setting of marks in thy meekness. For as witnesseth Saint Bernard, *Perfect meekness setteth no marks.*[1] Then settest thou marks in thy meekness when thou wilt not fulfil the counsel of thy ghostly sovereign,[2] unless thy wit see that it be to do. Lo! here mayest thou see that I covet sovereignty of thee. And truly so I do, and I will have it. I trow love stirreth me thereto more than any ableness that I feel in myself in any height of knowledge, or yet of working, or degree of my living. God amend what is amiss, for he knoweth fully, and I but in part.

But now, for to make satisfaction to thy proud wit, in commending of this work, truly I tell thee that if a soul that is thus occupied had tongue and language to say as it feeleth, then all the clerks in christendom should wonder at that wisdom. Yea! and in comparison of it all their great learning should seem open folly. And therefore no wonder that I cannot tell thee the worthiness of this work with my boisterous, beastly tongue. And God forbid that it should be so defouled in itself, for to be strained under the stirrings of a fleshly tongue. Nay, it may not be! And truly it will not be, and God forbid that I should covet it! For all that is spoken of it is not it, but of it. But now, since we may not speak it, let us speak of it, in confusion of proud wits and especially of thine, the which is at the least the only occasion and the cause of this writing at this time.

At the first I ask of thee, what is perfection of man's soul and which be the properties that pertain to this perfection? I answer in thy person and I say, that perfection of man's soul is nought else but a onehead made betwixt God and it in perfect charity. This perfection is so high and so pure in itself above the understanding of man, that it may not be known nor perceived in itself. But there where the properties that pertain to this perfection be verily seen and

[1] *Nam perfecta obedientia legem nescit, terminis non arctatur.* P.L., clxxxii. 868.

[2] Superior.

perceived, there it is likely that the substance is abounding. And therefore we must know here which be the qualities that pertain to perfection, in declaring of the nobleness of this ghostly exercise before all others.

The properties that pertain to perfection, the which each perfect soul ought to have, be virtues. And then, if thou wilt verily behold to this work in thy soul and to the property and the condition of each virtue diversely, thou shalt find that all virtues be clearly and perfectly comprehended in it, without any crooking or corruption of the intent. I touch no virtue here in special, for it needeth not; thou hast them touched in other diverse places of mine own writing. For this same work, if it be verily conceived, is that reverent affection and the fruit separated from the tree that I speak of in the little *Epistle of Prayer*.[1] This is the *cloud of unknowing*; this is that privy love put in purity of spirit; this is the ark of the testament. This is Denis' divinity, his wisdom and his treasure, his lightsome darkness and his unknown knowing. This it is that setteth thee in silence, as well from thoughts as from words. This maketh thy prayer full short. In this thou art learned to forsake the world and to despise it. And—that more is—in this thou art learned to forsake and despise thine own self, according to the teaching of Christ in the Gospel, saying thus: *Si quis vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum et tollat crucem suam et sequatur me.* That is: "Whoso will come after me, let him forsake himself, let him bear his cross and follow me."[2] As if he said thus to thine understanding according to our matter: "Whoso will come meekly, not with me, but after me, to the bliss of heaven, or to the mount of perfection." For Christ went before by nature, and we come after by grace. His nature is more worthy than grace, and grace is more worthy than our nature. And in this he letteth us know fully that we may on no wise follow him to the mount of perfection, as it ought to be in the use of this work, unless we be stirred and led by grace; and that is full truth.[3]

[1] See this *Epistle* in the *Cell of Self-Knowledge*, ed. E. G. Gardner (1910), pp. 77–92.

[2] Matt. xvi. 24.

[3] In this paragraph the author refers to other works of his, among which we may clearly discern the *Epistle of Prayer*, the *Cloud of Unknowing*, and *Denis Hid Divinity*.

For know thou right well, and all like unto thee that this writing shall either read or hear, that although I bid thee thus plainly and thus boldly set thee to this work, nevertheless yet I feel verily without error or doubt that Almighty God with his grace must always be the chief stirrer and worker, either with means or without, and thou only, or any other like unto thee, but the consenter and the sufferer. Saving that this consenting and this suffering shall be in the time of this work actually disposed and abled to this work in purity of spirit, and seemly borne up to thy Sovereign, as thou may be learned by the proof in the ghostly sight of thy spirit. And since it so is that God of his goodness stirreth and toucheth diverse souls diversely, as it is, some with mean and some without, who dare then say that God stirreth not thee in this writing, or any other like unto thee that it shall either read or hear, only by me as mean, though I be unworthy, saving his worshipful will that he liketh to do as he liketh? I suppose it shall be thus: the work shall witness when the proof worketh.[1] And therefore, I pray thee, dispose thee for to receive this grace of thy Lord, and hear what he saith: "Whoso will come after me (in the manner aforesaid) let him forsake himself." I pray thee, how may a man more forsake himself and the world, and more despise himself and the world, than for to disdain for to think of any qualities of their beings?

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

That a man must forget his own being in order to feel only the being of God; and of the pain entailed in this effort

For know thou for certain, that although I bid thee forget all things but the blind feeling of thy naked being, yet nevertheless my will is—and that was mine intent in the beginning—that thou forget the feeling of the being of thyself as for the feeling of the being of God. And for this reason I proved thee in the beginning that God is thy being. But for methought that thou wert not yet able suddenly to be lifted up to the ghostly feeling of the being of God, for rudeness in thy ghostly feeling, therefore, to let thee climb thereto by degrees, I bade thee first gnaw on the naked feeling of thine own being, unto

[1] When the disciple has gained experience of it.

the time that thou mightest be made able to the high feeling of God by ghostly continuance in this privy work. For thine own intent and thy desire shall be ever to feel God in this working. For although I bid thee in the beginning, because of thy boisterousness and thy ghostly rudeness, lap and clothe the feeling of thy God in the feeling of thyself, yet shalt thou after, when thou art made by continuance more subtle in cleanness of spirit, strip, spoil, and utterly unclothe thyself of all manner of feeling of thyself, that thou mayest be able to be clothed with the gracious feeling of God himself. And this is the true condition of a perfect lover, only and utterly to spoil himself of himself for that thing that he loveth, and not admit nor suffer to be clothed but only in that thing that he loveth; and that not only for a time, but endlessly to be enwrapped therein in full and final forgetting of himself.

This is the work of love that none may know but he that feeleth it. This is the lesson of our Lord when he saith: "Whoso will love me, let him forsake himself." As who should say: Let him spoil himself of himself, if he will be verily clothed in me that am the full garment of love and of lasting that never shall have end. And therefore, ever when thou beholdest to thy working, and seest and feelest that it is thyself that thou feelest and not God, then shalt thou make sorrow earnestly and heartily long after the feeling of God, evermore desiring without ceasing for to forgo the woeful witting and the foul feeling of thy blind being; and covet to flee from thyself as from venom. And then forsakest thou thyself and despisest thee full felly[1] as thy Lord biddeth thee. And then when thou covetest so earnestly, not for to un-be—for that were madness and despite unto God—but for to forgo the knowing and the feeling of thy being—the which must nevertheless be, if God's love shall perfectly be felt as it may be here—and seest and feelest that on no wise thou mayest come to thy purpose—for there will always follow and go with thy doing a naked feeling of thy blind being, be thou never so busy, except it be some seldom short time when God will let thee feel himself in abundance of love; the which naked feeling of thy blind being will evermore press above thee, betwixt thee and thy God, as will in thy beginning the qualities of thy being betwixt thee and thyself—then wilt thou think it a full heavy and a

[1] Felly = fiercely, severely.

full painful burthen of thyself. Yea! Jesu help thee then, for then hast thou need. For all the woe that may be without that, is not a point to that. For then art thyself a cross to thyself. And this is true working and the way to our Lord, as he himself saith: "Let him bear his cross," first in the painfulness of himself, and after "follow me" into bliss, or into the mount of perfection, tasting the softness[1] of my love in godly feeling of myself.

Lo! here mayest thou see that thou must sorrowfully desire to forgo the feeling of thyself, and painfully bear the burthen of thyself as a cross, ere thou mayest be oned to God in ghostly feeling of himself, the which is perfect charity. And here mayest thou see somewhat and in part feel—according as thou art touched and ghostly marked with this grace—the worthiness of this work before all other.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

That this work lieth not in busy meditations; and that, nevertheless, meditation upon Christ our Lord is the true and only door thereto

And, I pray thee, how shouldst thou come to this working by the use of thy wits? Surely never. Nor yet by thy fair, wise, thy subtle, and thy quaint[2] imaginations and meditations. Yea! though they be of thy wretched living, or though it be of the passion of Christ, the joys of our Lady, or of all the saints and angels of heaven, or yet of any quality, or subtlety, or condition, that pertaineth to the being of thyself or of God. Surely I had liever have such a naked blind feeling of myself, as I touched before. (Not of my doings, but of myself. Many men call their doings themself, and it is not so; for one am I that do, and another are my deeds that be done. And the same it is of God; for one is he in himself, and another be his works.) And rather it should break my heart in tears for lacking of the feeling of God and for the painful burthen of myself, and kindle my desire in love and desiring after the feeling of God, than all the subtle and the quaint imaginations or meditations that man can tell or may find written in

[1] Sweetness. [2] Clever, ingenious.

book, be they never so holy, nor show they never so fair to the subtle eye of thy curious wit.

Nevertheless yet be these fair meditations the truest way that a sinner may have in his beginning to the ghostly feeling of himself and of God. And I would think that it were impossible to man's understanding—although God may do what he will—that a sinner should come to be restful in the ghostly feeling of himself and of God, unless he first saw and felt by imagination and meditation the bodily doings of himself and of God, and thereto sorrowed for that that were to sorrow, and made joy for that that were to joy. And whoso cometh not in by this way, he cometh not truly; and therefore he must stand without and doth so, when he weeneth best that he is within. For many ween that they be within the ghostly door, and yet stand they without, and shall do, unto the time that they seek meekly the door. And some there be that find the door soon and come in sooner than some; and that is along of the porter, plainly without price or deserving of themselves.

It is a marvellous household ghostliness! For our Lord is not only porter himself, but also the door: the porter by his Godhead, and the door by his Manhood. Thus saith he himself in the Gospel: *Ego sum ostium. Per me si quis introierit, salvabitur; et sive egredietur sive ingredietur, pascua inveniet. Qui vero non intrat per ostium sed ascendit aliunde, ille fur est et latro.*[1] That is to thine understanding as if he said thus according to our matter: "I that am almighty by my Godhead and may lawfully as porter let in whom I will, and by what way that I will, yet, because I will that there be a common plain way and an open entry to all that will come, so that none may be excused by unknowing of the way, I have clothed me in the common nature of man and made me so open that I am the door by my Manhood, and whoso entereth by me, he shall be safe."

They enter by the door, that in beholding of the passion of Christ sorrow their wickednesses, the which be cause of that passion, with bitter reproving of themselves that have deserved and not suffered, and with pity and compassion of that worthy Lord that so vilely suffered and nothing deserved; and then lift up their hearts to the love and the goodness of his Godhead, in the which he vouchsafed

[1] John x. St Bonaventure uses the same text for the same teaching in his *Itinerarium;* in the passage to the mystical state *Christus est via et ostium.*

to meek himself so low in our deadly manhood. All these enter by the door, and they shall be safe. And whether they go in, in the beholding of the love and the goodness of his Godhead, or go out, in beholding of the pains of his Manhood, they shall find ghostly food of devotion, enough, sufficient, and abounding to the health and saving of their souls, although they come never further inwards in this life.

And whoso entereth not by this door, but climbeth otherwise to perfection, by the subtle seeking and the curious fantastic working in his wild, wanton wits, leaving this common plain entry touched before and the true counsel of ghostly fathers: he, whatsoever he be, is not only a night thief, but a day skulker. A night thief he is, for he goeth in the darkness of sin, more leaning in his presumption to the singularity of his own wit and his will, than to any true counsel or to this common plain way touched before. A day skulker he is, for, under colour of clear ghostly living, privily he picketh[1] the outward signs and words of contemplation and hath not the fruit. And thus, because he feeleth in him sometime a liking[2] longing (so little as it is) to come near to God, therefore, blinded under colour of this, he weeneth all be good enough that he doth, when it is the perilousest purpose that may be, a young man to follow the fierceness of his desire unruled by counsel. And especially when it is singularly set to climb to high things, not only above himself, but above the common plain way of Christian men touched before, the which I call by the teaching of Christ the door of devotion and the truest entry of contemplation that may be in this life.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

That a man should always follow his own call, without judging others or seeking to force God; and that this work is not ruled by human wisdom, but by the high wisdom of God through the secret inspirations of his Spirit

But now forth in our matter that specially in this writing pertaineth unto thee, and to all other like unto thee in that disposition only. What thereof if this be the door, shall a man when he hath found the door stand ever thereat or therein and come never innermore?[3]

[1] Stealeth. [2] Pleasant. [3] Further in.

I answer for thee and say: that it is good that he do so ever, until the great rust of his boisterous bodilyness be in great part rubbed away, his counsel and his conscience to witness. And specially, ever till he be called innermore by the privy teaching of the Spirit of God, the which teaching is the readiest and the surest witness that may be had in this life of the calling and the drawing of a soul innermore to more special working of grace.

Evidence of this touching a man may have thus: If he feel in his continual exercise as it were a soft growing desire to come near God in this life, as it may be by a special ghostly feeling, as he heareth men speak of, or else findeth written in books. For he that feeleth him not stirred in hearing or reading of ghostly working, and especially in his each day's exercise by a growing desire to come near God, let him stand yet still at the door, as a man called to salvation but not yet to perfection.

And of one thing I warn thee, whatsoever thou be that this writing shall read or hear, and especially in this place where I make a difference betwixt them that be called to salvation and them that be called to perfection: that of whichever part thou feelest thy calling to be, look that thou neither judge nor discuss in the deeds of God nor of man further than only thyself. As, for instance, whom he stirreth and calleth to perfection and whom he calleth not; or of the shortness of time, why he calleth him rather than him. If thou wilt not err, look that thou judge not; but once hear and understand. If thou be called, give praising unto God and pray that thou fall not. And if thou be not yet called, pray meekly to God that he call thee when his will is. But teach him not what he shall do; let him alone! he is mighty, wise, and willing enough to do what is best for thee and for all them that love him. Have peace with thy part, whichever thou have. Thou needest not to complain, for they be both precious. The first is good and needeth always to be had; the second is better, get it whoso get it may; or (if I shall trulier say) whoso by grace is gotten and called thereto by our Lord. Proudly may we press, and stumble at the end. But truly without him it is nought that we do, himself saying: *Sine me nihil potestis facere.*[1] That is to thine understanding: without me first stirring and principally moving, and ye only but consenting and suffering, ye may do no-

[1] John xv. 5.

thing that is perfectly pleasing to me, as should be in a manner the work of this writing.

And all this I say in confusion of their erring presumption, that in the curiosity of their learning or their natural wit will always be principal workers themselves, God but suffering or only consenting; when verily the contrary is truth in things contemplative. For only in them be all curious reasons of learning or of natural knowledge far put back, that God may be the principal worker. Nevertheless, in things lawful and active, man's learning and his natural knowledge shall work with God by and by,[1] only by his consent in spirit, proved by these three witnesses: Scripture, counsel,[2] and common custom of nature, degree, age, and complexion. Insomuch that man shall not follow the stirring of the spirit, seem it never so liking nor so holy—I mean in things active—unless it fall under his learning or his natural knowledge, although it be never so strongly supported by all or by any of these three witnesses touched before. And verily there is great reason that man be more than his works. And for this it is, that by the statute and the ordinance of Holy Church, there shall no man be admitted to prelacy—the which is the highest degree in active living—unless the office of that cure will fall under his knowledge by testimony of true examination. So that, in things active, man's learning and his natural knowledge shall principally abound as in working—God graciously consenting —with these three witnesses approved. And reasonably, for all things active be beneath and under the wisdom of man. But, in things contemplative, the highest wisdom that may be in man, as man, is far put under, so that God be the principal in working, and man but only consenter and sufferer.

And thus I understand this word in the Gospel: *Sine me nihil potestis facere*—that is: "Without me ye may do nothing"—on one manner in actives and on another manner in contemplatives. In actives he must be, either with suffering, or with consent, or else with both, if aught shall be done, whether it be lawful and pleasant to him or not. In contemplatives, by principal working, asking of them nothing else but only sufferance and their consent. So that generally to understand: in all our doings, lawful and unlawful, active and contemplative, without him we may do nothing. He

[1] In due order. [2] The advice of a confessor or director.

is with us in sin only by sufferance and not by consent, to our final damnation unless we meekly amend us. In deeds that be active and lawful, he is with us both by suffering and consent: to our reproof if we go back, and to our great meed if we go forth. In deeds that be contemplative, he is with us principally stirring and working, and we only but suffering and consenting: to our great perfection and ghostly oneing of our soul unto him in perfect charity. And thus since all the men of this life may be divided in three: in sinners, in actives, and in contemplatives, therefore generally, according to all this world, this word of our Lord may be said unto all: "Without me"—either only suffering and not consenting, as in sinners; or else both suffering and consenting, as in actives; or (that more than all this is) principally stirring and working, as in contemplatives—"ye may do nothing."

Lo! here be many words and little matter. Nevertheless, all this I have said to let thee know in which things thou shalt use the works of thy wits, and in which not; and how that God is with thee in one work, and how in another. And yet, peradventure, in this knowing thou mayest eschew deceits, in the which thou mightest have fallen had not this been showed thee. And therefore, since it is said, let it be, although it be little pertaining to our matter. But now forth of our matter.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

Of two sorts of tokens in particular by the which a man may discern the call of God to this work

THOU mayest ask me this question: By what one token, or more if thou likest, tell me, may I soonest know without error whether this growing desire that I feel in mine each day's working, and this liking stirring that I have in reading and hearing of this matter, be verily a calling of God to a more special working of grace, as is the matter of this writing; or whether it is a nourishing and a feeding of my spirit to bide still and work forth in my common grace, this that thou callest the door and the common entry of all Christian men?

To this I answer so feebly as I can. Thou seest well here that I set

thee here in this writing two kinds of evidences, by the which thou shalt prove thy ghostly calling of God as to this work, one within and another without. Of the which two, neither may suffice in this case fully, as methinketh, without that other. But where they both be together one and according, then is thine evidence full enough without any failing. The first of these two evidences, the which is within, is this growing desire that thou feelest in thine each day's working. And of this desire thou shalt know thus much: that although the desire be a work of the soul that is blind in itself—for right so is desire of the soul as groping[1] and stepping are of the body; and both groping and stepping be blind works of the body, thou knowest well thyself—but though that the work of this desire be never so blind, yet nevertheless there commoneth[2] and followeth with it a manner of ghostly sight, the which is in part cause and a mean furthering this desire. Behold then busily to thine each day's exercise, what it is in itself. And then if it be the thought of thy wretchedness, the passion of Christ, or any such that belongeth to the common entry of Christian men touched before—then if it so be that this ghostly sight, that thus commoneth and followeth with thy blind desire, rise from these common beholdings, surely then it is a token to me that the growing of this desire is but a nourishing and a feeding of thy spirit to bide still and to work forth in thy common grace, and no calling nor stirring of God to any more special grace.

Now, furthermore, the other second evidence without is a liking stirring that thou feelest in reading or hearing of this matter. I call this evidence "without", because it cometh from without by the windows of thy bodily wits, as by hearing and seeing in the time of thy reading. Now touching the second evidence, if it so be that this liking stirring, that thou feelest in hearing and reading of this matter, last nor continue no longer with thee, but only for the time of thy reading or hearing, and ceaseth then or else soon after, so that thou neither wakest nor sleepest therein nor therewith, and especially it followeth thee not in thy quotidian exercise, as it were going and pressing betwixt thee and it, stirring and leading thy desire—then it is a true token in my conceit that this liking stirring, that thou feelest in hearing and reading of this matter, is but a

[1] Touching, feeling. [2] Accompanies.

natural gladness that every Christian soul hath in hearing or reading of the truth (and especially of that the which toucheth subtly and declareth verily the properties of perfection that most be according to the soul of man, and especially of God) and no ghostly touching of grace, nor calling of God to any other more special working of grace than is that the which is the door and the common entry to Christian men.

But if it so be that this liking stirring that thou feelest in reading and hearing of this matter be so abounding in itself that it goeth with thee to bed, it riseth with thee at morrow, it followeth thee forth all the day in all that thou dost, it reaveth thee from thy quotidian wonted exercise and goeth between thee and it, it commoneth and followeth with thy desire, insomuch that thou thinkest it all one desire or thou knowest never what, it changeth thy gesture and maketh thy countenance seemly; while it lasteth all things please thee and nothing may grieve thee; a thousand mile wouldst thou run to converse mouthly with one that thou knewest verily felt it; and yet, when thou comest there, canst thou nothing say, speak whoso speak will, for thou wouldst not speak but of it; few be thy words, but full of fruit and fire; a short word of thy mouth containeth a worldful of wisdom, yet seemeth it but folly to them that dwell in their own wits; thy silence is soft, thy speech full speedful, thy prayer is privy, thy pride full pure, thy manners be meek, thy mirth full mild, thy list is liking to play with a child; thou lovest to be alone and sit by thyself; men would hinder thee, thou thinkest, unless they wrought with thee; thou wouldst not read books nor hear books but only of it—then thine inward evidence and also thine outer were both according and knitting in one.[1]

[1] "Thy list is liking to play with a child". So the best MSS. Bodleian 576 leaves out "to play with a child". Douce 262 (a very bad text of the *Epistle*) paraphrases freely: "No heartly joy is to thee beside this liking that thou feelest in God." The Ampleforth MS. has: "Thy manners be meek and humble, thy mirth full mild, thy list to play with Jesu a child." The author uses "play" several times in its first sense of to exercise any activity, but also in the specific sense of to exercise love. See the *Epistle of Discretion* (*Cell of Self-Knowledge*, p. 108) with Gardner's note. See also the last paragraph of Chap. 46 of the *Cloud*. Dr Hodgson is disposed to take the passage in its straightforward meaning and would paraphrase it thus: "thy delight is pleasure in playing with a child."

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

Of desolation and of consolation, and why God sends them; with the conclusion about the tokens

YEA! and if both these evidences with all their supporters written now here—from the time that thou once have had them all or any of them—cease for a time, and thou be left as though thou wert barren, thou thinkest, as well from the feeling of this new fervour as from thine old wonted work, so that thou thinkest thee fallen down betwixt the two, having neither, but wanting them both: yet be not over heavy for this; but suffer meekly and bide patiently the will of our Lord. For now art thou in the ghostly sea (to my likeness),[1] shipping over from bodilyness into ghostliness.

Many great storms and temptations, peradventure, shall rise in this time, and thou knowest never whither to run for sorrow. All is away from thy feeling, common grace and special. Be not overmuch afraid, then, although thou have matter, as thou thinkest; but have a lovely trust in our Lord, so little as thou mayest get for the time, for he is not far. He shall look up, peradventure, right soon and touch thee again with a more fervent stirring of that same grace than ever thou feltest any before. Then art thou all whole and all is good enough, as thou thinkest, last while it last may. For suddenly, or ever thou knowest, all is away and thou left barren in the boat, blown with blundering blasts now hither and now thither, thou knowest never where nor whither. Yet be not abashed;[2] for he shall come, I promise thee, full soon, when he liketh, to relieve thee and doughtily deliver thee of all thy dole,[3] far more worthily than ever

[1] As I should liken it. Compare the *Epistle of Discretion* (*Cell of Self-Knowledge*, p. 98): "Among the diversity of temptations and tribulations that falleth to a soul in this ebbing and flowing life (the which are ensampled by the storms and the floods of the sea) on the one party, and among the grace and the goodness of the Holy Ghost, the manyfold visitation, sweetness, and comfort of spirit (the which are ensampled by the peaceable wind and the soft weathers of the air) on the other party, the sely soul, at the likeness of a ship, attaineth at the last to the land of stableness, and to the haven of health. . ."

[2] Dismayed. [3] Sorrow, pain.

he did before. Yea! and if he after go, after will he come again; and each time, if thou wilt bear thee by meek suffering, will he come more worthlier and merrylier than other. And all this he doth because he will have thee made as pliant to his will ghostly as a roan[1] glove to thine hand bodily.

And since he sometimes goeth and sometimes cometh, therefore doubly in this double work will he privily prove thee and work thee to his own work. By the withdrawing of thy fervour, the which thou thinkest is his going, although it be not so, will he properly prove thy patience. For know thou right well, that though God sometimes withdraw these sensible sweetnesses, these fervent feelings, and these flaming desires, nevertheless he withdraweth never the rather his grace in his chosen. For surely I may not believe that his special grace may ever be withdrawn from his chosen, that once have been touched therewith, unless deadly sin were in the cause. But all these sensible sweetnesses, these fervent feelings, and these flaming desires—the which in themselves be not grace, but tokens of grace—these be oftentimes withdrawn in proving of our patience, and oftentimes for our other many ghostly profits, more than we ween. For grace in itself is so high, so pure, and so ghostly, that it may not be felt in our sensible part. The tokens thereof may, but not it. And thus sometimes our Lord will withdraw thy sensible fervours, both for increasing and proving of thy patience; and not only for this reason, but for many others, the which I set not here at this time. But forth of our matter.

By the worthiness, the oftenness, and the growing of these sensible feelings touched before—the which thou thinkest his coming, although it be not so—he will nourish and feed thy spirit, to last and to live in love and worshipping of him. So that thus by patience in absence of these sensible feelings, the tokens of grace, and by that lively nourishing and that lovely feeding of thy spirit in their presence, he will make thee in both together so blithely bowing and so pleasantly pliant to the perfection and the ghostly onehead to his own will—the which oneing is perfect charity—that thou shalt be as glad and as fain to forgo such feelings at his will, as for to have them and feel them in continuance all thy lifetime.

And in this time is thy love both chaste and perfect. In this time it

[1] A leather glove, as made in Rouen.

is that thou both seest thy God and thy love, and nakedly feelest him also by ghostly oneing to his love in the sovereign point of thy spirit, as he is in himself, but blindly as it may be here, utterly spoiled of thyself and nakedly clothed in himself, as he is, unclothed and not lapped in any of these sensible feelings—be they never so sweet nor so holy—that may fall in this life. But in purity of spirit properly and perfectly he is perceived and felt in himself as he is, far removed from any fantasy or false opinion that may fall in this life.

This sight and this feeling of God (thus in himself as he is) may no more be separated from God in himself (to thine understanding that thus feelest or thus seest) than may be separated God himself from his own being, the which be but one both in substance and also in nature. So that as God may not be from his being, for onehead in nature, so may not that soul (that thus seeth and feeleth) be from that thing that he thus seeth and feeleth, for onehead in grace.

Lo! thus and by these tokens mayest thou somewhat feel, and in part prove, the manner and the worthiness of thy calling and thy stirring in grace in thy ghostly working within, and in thy reading or hearing of this matter without. And then from the time be that thou, or any other like unto thee as in spirit, have had very experience of all these tokens or of any of them—for at the first time there be but full few that be so specially touched and marked with this grace that they may have soon or suddenly in very feeling the proof of them all; nevertheless it sufficeth to have some one or two, though a man have not all the first time—and therefore if thou feel that thou hast true experience of one or of two, proved by true examination of Scripture, and of counsel, and of conscience: then is it speedful to thee some time for to cease from these quaint meditations and these subtle imaginations of the qualities of thy being and of God's, and of the works of thyself and of God (in the which thy wits have been fed, and with the which thou hast been led from worldliness and bodilyness to that ableness of grace that thou art in) for to learn how thou shalt be occupied ghostly in feeling of thyself or of God, whom thou hast learned so well before by thinking and imagining of thy doings.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

That our Lord himself teacheth this work; and that the contemplative should persevere in humility and in love

An ensample of this showed Christ in his life. For if it had so been that there had been no higher perfection in this life but in the beholding and in the loving of his Manhood, I trow that he would not then have ascended unto heaven whiles this world had lasted, nor withdrawn his bodily presence from his special lovers on earth. But for there was a higher perfection the which a man may have in this life—that is to say, a pure ghostly feeling in the love of his Godhead—therefore he said to his disciples, the which grudged for to forgo his bodily presence (as thou dost in part and in manner for to forgo thy curious meditations and thy quaint subtle wits): that it was speedful to them that he went bodily from them: *Expedit vobis ut ego vadam.*[1] That is: "It is speedful to you that I go bodily from you." Upon this word saith the doctor thus: "That unless the shape of his Manhood be withdrawn from our bodily eyes, the love of his Godhead may not fasten in our ghostly eyes."[2] And thus say I unto thee, that it is speedful some time to leave off thy curious working in thy wits and to learn thee to taste somewhat in thy feeling ghostly of the love of thy God.

And to this feeling shalt thou come by that way that I tell thee, by the help of grace going before. And that is, that thou evermore without ceasing lean to the naked feeling of thyself, evermore offering thy being unto God as for the most precious offering that thou mayest make. But look, as I oft said, that it be naked, for fear of deceit. If it be naked, then will it be full painful to thee in the beginning to abide therein any while. And that is, as I before said, because thy wits find no meat therein unto them. But no matter thereof, for I would love it the better. Let them fast awhile, I pray thee, from their natural delight in their knowledge. For, as it is well said, *a man naturally desireth to know*;[3] but surely he may not taste of ghostly feeling in God but only by grace, have he never so much knowledge of learning or of nature. And therefore, I pray thee, seek

[1] John xvi. 7. [2] St Augustine, Sermon cxliii; P.L., xxxviii. 786.
[3] The first words of the *Metaphysics* of Aristotle.

more after feeling than after knowing, for knowing oftentimes deceiveth with pride; but meek, lovely feeling may not beguile: *Scientia inflat, caritas aedificat.*[1] In knowing is travail, in feeling is rest.

But now mayest thou say: What rest is this that thou speakest of? For methinketh it is travail painful and no rest. For when I set me to do as thou sayest, I find therein no rest, but pain and battle on all sides. For on that one part my wits would have me away, and I will not; and on that other part I would feel God and lack the feeling of myself, and I may not. So that battle is on all sides and pain, and this seemeth to me a quaint rest that thou speakest of. To this I answer and say: that thou art not yet used in this work, and therefore it is more painful to thee. But if thou wert wont thereto and knewest by experience what profit were therein, thou wouldst not willingly come out thereof to have all the bodily rest and joy of this world. And yet it is great pain and travail also. But in that I call it a rest, for the soul is not in doubt what it shall do; and also for a soul is assured—I mean in the time of this doing—that it shall not much err.

And therefore go forth with meekness and fervent desire in this work, the which beginneth in this life and never shall have end in the life everlasting. To the which I beseech almighty Jesu to bring all those the which he hath bought with his precious blood. Amen.[2]

[1] 1 Cor. viii. 1. [2] This paragraph is a late addition.

HERE ENDETH THE EPISTLE OF PRIVY COUNSEL

III. HERE FOLLOWETH THE TRANSLATION OF DENIS HID DIVINITY

HERE BEGINNETH THE PROLOGUE

THIS writing that next followeth is the English of a book that Saint Denis wrote unto Timothy, the which is called in Latin tongue *Mystica Theologia*. Of the which book, for that it is made mind in the seventieth chapter of a book written before—the which is called the *Cloud of Unknowing*—how that Denis' sentence will clearly confirm all that is written in that same book: therefore, in translation of it, I have not only followed the naked letter of the text, but for to declare the hardness of it, I have much followed the sentence of the Abbot of Saint Victor,[1] a noble and a worthy expositor of this same book.

THIS IS SAINT DENIS' PRAYER

THOU unbegun and everlasting Wisdom, the which in thyself art the sovereign-substantial Firsthood, the Sovereign-goddess,[2] and the Sovereign-good; the inly Beholder of the godly made wisdom of Christian men: I beseech thee for to draw us up in an according ableness to the sovereign-unknown and the sovereign-shining

[1] Thomas of St Victor, Abbot of Vercelli, † 1246, of whom something is said in the Introduction. As his basic Latin text the author used Sarracenus but interpolated much from the paraphrase and commentary of Abbot Thomas. Previous editions of this book contained a Latin version, but this has now been omitted, as being of doubtful service to the general reader.

[2] The translator has altered the invocation of the Trinity (with which Denis begins) into an invocation of the Eternal Wisdom. Vercellensis has much to say of the "wisdom of Christians", which he interprets as supra-intellectual knowledge, and his exposition has perhaps influenced the translator. His invocation recalls the "Great O" of 17 December: *O Sapientia, attingens a fine usque ad finem* . . . based on Wisdom viii. 1. Sovereign-substantial = super-substantial, and so with the rest. The version of Sarracenus begins thus: *Trinitas supersubstantialis et superdea et superbona*. It will be noticed that the translator has turned *superdea* and *superbona* into nouns, thus getting his surprising "Sovereign-goddess". I prefer to think that he considered this a suitable apostrophe for Wisdom rather than that he misunderstood *superdea*.

height of thy dark inspired speakings, where all the privy things of divinity be covered and hid under the sovereign-shining darkness of wisest silence, making the sovereign-clearest sovereignly for to shine privily in the darkest; and the which is—in a manner that is always invisible and ungropable—sovereignly fulfilling with full fair clarities all those souls that be not having eyes of mind.[1]

And for all these things be above mind, therefore with affection[2] above mind (as I may) I desire to purchase them unto me with this prayer.

THE FIRST CHAPTER

How a man shall rise in this hid divinity by doing away of all things on this side God

THOU friend Timothy, what time that thou purposest thee by the stirring of grace to the actual exercise of thy blind beholdings: look thou forsake, with a strong and a sly[3] and a listy contrition, both thy bodily wits (as hearing, seeing, smelling, tasting, and touching), and also thy ghostly wits, the which be called thine understandable workings; and all those things the which may be known with any

[1] The darkness, in an invisible and intangible manner, illuminates with wonderful splendours those souls that enter into it by closing the eyes of their mind—that is, by ceasing from the act of the intellect.

[2] The highest way of knowing God, says Vercellensis, is beyond the operation of sense or intellect and is the work of love. Its faculty is *principalis affectio*, the supreme affection or higher will. This little phrase "with affection above mind", introduced here and below from the commentary of Vercellensis, develops the teaching of Denis and makes the mystic effort definitely an effort of love. For Denis also the mystical experience obviously requires an effort of will and love, but he does not so analyse it; still less does he assign it to any super-faculty and locate it in any special part of the soul. Vercellensis, on the other hand, assigns it to the supreme loving-power (*principalis affectio*) and gives it as its organ the spark of conscience (*scintilla synderesis*; *cf.* the *Fünklein* of German mystics). It came to be located in the fine point (*apex*) of the soul, and in its bottom or core (*fundus*). Denis has none of this. For him it was enough that the finite human spirit should somehow be united with the Infinite Spirit and by this inexpressible union receive an ineffable illumination.

[3] MS. sleigh = subtle.

of thy five bodily wits without-forth; and all those things the which may be known by thy ghostly wits within-forth; and all those things that be now, or yet have been, though they be not now; and all those things that be not now, or yet may be in time for to come, though they be not now. And, as it is possible to me for to speak and to thee to understand, look that thou rise with me in this grace (in a manner that is thou knowest never how) to be oned with him that is above all substances and all manner of knowing. For why, through the overpassing of thyself and all other things, and thus making thyself clean from all worldly, fleshly, and natural liking in thine affection, and from all thing that may be known by the proper form in thy knowing, thou shalt be drawn up above mind in affection[1] to the sovereign-substantial beam of the godly darkness, all things thus done away.

Beware that none of these unwise men, yet dwelling in their wits, hear these things. These men I call all those that be fastened in knowing and in loving of these things that be knowable and have beginning. The which have opinion that nothing is sovereign-substantially above these foresaid being things. But they ween for to know him *that hath made darkness his hiding-place*,[2] by that knowing which is after themselves. And since (by witness of the prophet)[3] the godly teachings of these privities be above these men, what shall we say then of those that be more unwise, dwelling yet not only in their ghostly wits of natural philosophy, but low down beneath in their bodily wits, the which they have but in common with only beasts? For these men con not[4] come to the knowing of the First Cause, the which is sovereignly set above all things, but by making of figures of the last and the least worthy things of these being visible things, as stocks or stones.[5] And they say that it hath nothing above those wicked and manifold formations made by themselves in their fantastic imaginative wits.

[1] See p. 140, footnote 2. [2] Ps. xvii. 12.

[3] This is from Vercellensis, who refers to Job xxviii. 20–1: "Whence then cometh wisdom? and where is the place of understanding? It is hid from the eyes of all living, and the fowls of the air know it not."

[4] Know not how to.

[5] Vercellensis: *figurant Deum ex extremis materiis, scilicet lapidibus et metallis.*

It is nothing thus; but thus must it be. It behoveth us for to set, for to see, and for to affirm all the settings and the beings of all these being things in him that is above all knowing and mind, as him being the cause of all these things. And, more properly and more mightily, for to deny all these being things, as him sovereignly being above them all, full high in himself, separated from them all. And, not for to have it in opinion that these denyings of these being things be contrary to the first affirmings of them; but fastly for to hold, in sight of belief, him for to be above all doing away of these being or beable things, the which in himself is above all, yea! both doing away and affirming of them all.

And for this reason it is that the godly Bartholomew, the Apostle of Christ, saith in his writing[1] that Christ's divinity is both much and it is least; and the Gospel is broad and much, and eftsoons he saith it is strait and little. As it seemeth to me, in this he was ravished to behold above nature, where he saith that the good cause of all is both of many words and of short sayings, as neither having reason nor understanding with the which he might be come to that is sovereign-substantially set above all these being things. And yet nevertheless not covered; but verily and clearly he appeareth open, not to all, but to them only the which pass above both all unclean and clean being things, and the which come above all ascensions of all holy ends or terms set unto man or to angel, and the which forsake all divine lights and all heavenly sounds and words and enter with affection[2] into darkness, where verily he is, as the Scripture showeth,[3] the which is above all.

Ensample of this see by the story:[4] How the godly Moses, mildest of men, first he is bidden to be cleansed, both in himself and also in his people, and after that to be separated from occasion of defiling. And then, after all cleansing of himself and of his people, he heard trumps of many voices and saw many lights with shining, sending out from them full broad and full clean beams. Afterwards he was separated from the multitude of this people, and with priests

[1] Nothing is known of any writing of St Bartholomew's.

[2] See p. 140, footnote 2.

[3] *Nubes et caligo in circuitu ejus:* "Clouds and darkness are round about him" (Ps. xcvi. 2).

[4] Exod. xix and xxiv.

that were chosen he attained to the highness of the godly ascensions, the which is the terms and the bounds of man's understanding, be it never so helped with grace. And yet in all this he was not with God, so as it accordeth to the perfection of this divinity; but he had in contemplation an object not himself, for he may not be seen by that eye. But the place where he was, that was his object. And that place betokeneth the highest godly beholdings, passing above and having in subjection all man's reasons, as the lady hath her maidens.[1] By the which godly beholdings, the presence of him that is above all thinking is sovereignly showed to man's understandings, and setteth him above the natural terms of himself. And then he is assoiled[2] both from the understandable working powers of his soul, and from the objects of them—that is for to say, all those things in the which they work.

In this time it was that Moses in singularity of affection[3] was separated from these beforesaid chosen priests, and entered by himself the darkness of unknowing, the which darkness is verily hid; in the which he shuts out all knowable knowing. And surely he is made (in a manner that is invisible and ungropable) for to feel in experience the presence of him that is above all things, not having feeling nor thinking of no being thing nor yet of himself. But, in avoiding of all knowing that is still unknowing, he is knitted unto him in the best manner; and in that that he knoweth nothing, he is made to be knowing above mind.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

How we shall be oned to the cause of all, being above all

In this sovereign-shining darkness we pray to be done up, and, by not seeing and unknowing, for to see and for to know him that is above all seeing and all knowing, in this same not see and not know. And sovereign-substantially for to praise, by doing away of all these being things, him that is sovereign-substantial in himself. The manner of which doing away may be seen by this ensample that followeth.

[1] Ps. cxxii. 2. *Sicut oculi ancillae in manibus dominae suae.* See p. 112.
[2] Absolved, set free. [3] See p. 140, footnote 2.

Here is a man having a sound stock of the greatest quantity without him, lying before him, and having within him intent and craft to make an image of the least quantity, of that place of the wood the which is (by measuring of right lining) in the centre and the middle of that same stock. First thou knowest well by natural wit that ere he may come for to see that image by clear bodily sight of his outward eye, or for to show it to be seen unto other, the which he hath in himself by clear craft of imagination, the stock yet being whole on every side, he must surely by craft and by instruments remove all the outward parts of that wood, being about and hindering the sight of that same image. Right so we must have us in this high divine work, as it is possible to be come to in understanding by such a boisterous ensample of so contrary a kind.[1]

For we must be in this work as it were men making an image of his naked, unmade, and unbegun nature; the which, though it be in itself and to itself evermore free—within all creatures, not inclosed; without all creatures, not shut out; above all creatures, not borne up; beneath all creatures, not put down; behind all creatures, not put back; before all creatures, not driven forth—nevertheless yet, to man's understanding (the whiles it is knitted to this corrupted body) he is nevermore clearly showed but as it were a thing that were covered and overlapped and overlaid with innumerable sensible bodies and understandable substances, with many a marvellous fantastic image, congealed as it were in a cumbrous clog about him, as the image of the ensample written before is hid in the thick great sound stock. The which cumbrous clog, thus congealed of these innumerable diversities, we must surely pare away craftily by sleight of grace in this divine work, as strong hindrances contrarying unto this clean hid sight. And thus by this sly gracious doing away of them all, we must clearly praise, and above mind, the self fairhead[2] in the self naked and unmade and unbegun nature; in a manner that is unknown how unto all, but only to those that it proveth; and yet evermore to those same but only in time of the proof.[3]

It behoveth us all that be practisers of this divinity, for to make

[1] The translator develops this simile considerably. It is an illustration used by Plotinus (*Ennead* I. 6, 9).

[2] Absolute beauty. [3] Experience.

our denyings on the contrary manner to our affirmings. For why, we setting our affirmings begin at the most worthy things of these being things, and so forth by the means we descend to the least. But in our denyings we begin at the least and rise up to the most. And eftsoons by the means, from the highest to the last, and from the last to the highest again, we fold all together and do them away, that we may clearly know that unknowing the which is walled about[1] from all knowable powers in all these being things; and that we may see that sovereign-substantial darkness, privily hid from all light in these being things.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

Which books be of affirming and which of denying divinity

And for this reason in our other books of divinity—and most in the books that be affirming divinity, the which be these: the first[2] of the *Hierarchies of Heaven*, and the second of the *Hierarchies of this Fighting Church*—in both these, we have set with praising how that high divine singular Nature, the which is God, is one; how it is three, the which after itself is called Fatherhood and Sonhood and Holy Ghosthood; how the lights of goodness dwelling in the heart burgeoned of that immaterial and that only good in himself and of himself; and how that in this dwelling in himself by onehead of substance, and in themselves by trinity of Persons, and in them together with an even everlasting burgeoning they dwell still unpassingly; how that the sovereign-substantial Jesu is made substance in the truths of human nature; and all other such things that be expressed in the Scripture, be affirmingly praised in those two books.

[1] This should be "veiled about", i.e. enshrouded, hidden. The translator used an imperfect MS. which had *vallatam* instead of *velatam*.

[2] The extant writings of Denis (omitting the Letters) are four: *Celestial Hierarchy*, *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, *Divine Names*, and *Mystical Theology*; and, they are numbered "first", "second", "third", and "fourth" in some MSS. Besides these, Denis alludes in this chapter to two other works of which there is no trace: *Theological Outlines* (*Hypotyposes*) and *Symbolical Theology*. The translator calls the latter the *Gathering of Divine Sentence*; for the former he here substitutes the *Hierarchies*.

And in the book of *God's Names* it is affirmingly set and praised, how that he is named Good, how Being, how Life, how Wisdom, and how Virtue, and what other that they be of the understandable naming of God. But, in the book of the *Gathering of Divine Sentence*, there I have affirmingly set with praising all the names that be applied unto God from these sensible things—as which be the godly forms, which be the godly figures, which be his parts and his instruments, which be his places and his adornments, which be his frenzies and his heavinesses, which be his madnesses and his drunkennesses, which be his gluttonies and his oaths and his cursing, which be his sleepings, and which be his wakings; and what other sensible forms that on any manner in Holy Scripture be applied unto God.

All these I deem thou hast seen; and how these last things be of more words than the first things. For why, it must surely be that the first two books of the *Hierarchies* and the opening[1] of the *Godly Names* in the third book were of fewer words than this *Gathered Book of Divine Sentence*, touched here last. For inasmuch as we behold to things that be most high, insomuch the words that be spoken of them to our beholdings make strait our understanding. As it is now here in this book, when we enter into the darkness that is above mind, we shall not only find the shortening of words, but as it were a madness and a perfect unreasonability of all that we say. And in all the other books our enditing descended from the highest things to the lowest; and, according to the quantity of descending, it spread out to a great multitude. But now it ascendeth in this book from the lowest things to the highest; and according to the measure of the ascension—the which is sometimes suddener than other—it is made strait. And after all such ascension it shall all be without voice, and all it shall be knitted to a thing that is unspeakable.

But haply thou askest: What is the reason why that in affirmative divinity we begin at the most worthy things, and in the negative divinity at the least worthy things? This is the reason: For when we will mark God by setting of all understandable things—the which in himself is above all setting and all understanding—it is most according that we set first those things that be most worthy and most nigh unto him. And if we will mark him by doing away of all understandable things, it accordeth most that we first do away those

[1] i.e., exposition.

things the which be seen to be most far from him. As thus: more nigh and more according unto him is life or goodness than is air or a stone; and with more according evidence we should do away from him gluttony and madness, than speaking or understanding. And yet he in himself is above both all speaking and all understanding.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

That he is none of sensible things the which is cause of them all

We put away first from God thing that is without substance, and all thing that is not, beginning from the most far; for that thing is more further than those things that but only be and live not. [And then we put away those things that but only be and live not;][1] for that is further than that that is and liveth. And after that we put away those things that be and live and lack feeling; for those be further than those that have feeling. And after that we put away those that have feeling and lack reason and understanding; for those be further than those that have reason and understanding. And with all these things we remove from him all bodily thing, and all those things that pertain to body, or to bodily things—as is shape, form, quality, quantity, weight, position, visibility, sensibility, and all doing and suffering; all inordination of fleshly concupiscence, all troubled complexion of material passion, all impotence subject unto sensible chances, all needfulness of light; and all generation, and all corruption, and all division, and all passibility, and all temporal flowing by process of times. For he neither is any of these things nor hath any of these, or any or all these other sensible things.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

That he is none of understandable things the which is cause of them all

Also we, ascending and beginning our denyings and our doings away at the highest of understandable things, say that he is neither

[1] This clause is supplied by the editor. It is one that might easily have been omitted by a scribe, and it seems needed by the context.

soul, nor angel, nor hath fantasy, nor opinion, nor reason, nor understanding; nor he is reason nor understanding; nor he is said nor understood. And—that we run from these high things by means to the last things—he is no number, nor order, nor greatness, nor littleness, nor equality, nor likeness, nor unlikeness; nor he standeth, nor he moveth, nor he holdeth no silence, nor he speaketh. And—that we turn again to the highest things by some means, and end our denyings at things most high—we say that he hath no virtue, nor he is virtue, nor light, nor he liveth, nor he is life, nor he is substance, nor age, nor time, nor there is any understandable touching of him, nor he is knowledge, nor truth, nor kingdom, nor wisdom, nor one, nor unity, nor Godhead or goodness; nor he is spirit, as we understand spirit; nor sonhood, nor fatherhood, nor any other thing known by us or by any that be; nor he is anything of not-being things, nor anything of being things; nor any of those things that be know him as he is; nor he knoweth those things that be as they be in themselves, but as they be in him;[1] nor there is any way of reason or understanding to come unto him; nor name, nor knowing of him; nor he is darkness, nor he is light, nor he is error, nor he is truth. Nor (knittingly to say) there is of him no setting nor doing away; but, when we affirmingly set or denyingly do away all or any of those things that be not he, him we may neither set nor do away, nor in any understandable manner affirm him, nor deny him. For the perfect and the singular Cause of all must needs be without comparison of the most high height above all both setting and doing away. And his not-understandable overpassing is un-understandably above all affirming and denying.

[1] The knowledge which God has of existing things is not gathered, as is ours, from their natures and forms, but he knows them by knowing himself, the eternal cause of all things. So the commentary of Vercellensis.

HERE ENDETH THE TRANSLATION OF DENIS HID DIVINITY

IV. SECRETUM SIVE MYSTICUM
BEING AN EXPOSITION OR CERTAIN NOTES UPON THE BOOK CALLED THE CLOUD

BY FATHER AUGUSTINE BAKER (1575–1641)

Monk of the English Benedictine Congregation

"Be ye humbled under the mighty hand of God." (1 Pet. v 6).

Part I: General Introduction

THE PROLOGUE

THIS treatise of mine I call *Secretum* or *Mysticum*—the words have the same meaning—both because it containeth mystic matters, such as Saint Denis (upon whose writings the *Cloud* is a commentary) forbiddeth to be communicated to those that use their external senses more than internal and spiritual exercises; and also because it containeth certain particular passages which I do not think fit to be made known to any save to such as do really pursue internal lives or at least think so well thereof, that they will rather reverence with silence what they find therein above their knowledge or different from their own practice or course of life, than deride or deprave the same.[1]

THE FIRST CHAPTER

Of the authorship of the book called the Cloud, and who should read it

BY the words and phrases of the book I conjecture that it was first penned about the time of King Richard the Third of England, or at least in the time of King Henry the Seventh. And so I conceive that it was penned about the year of our Lord 1500, or some few years before or after.[2] I do not take it to be any translation, but to have

[1] When Father Baker wrote *Secretum* (1629), he was living at Cambrai and serving as spiritual director to the community of English Benedictine nuns which is now at Stanbrook (Worcester). For more about him and his book, see *The Confessions of Father Augustine Baker* (London, 1922), that volume containing those parts of *Secretum* in which the author digresses from his commentary on the *Cloud* to narrate his personal spiritual experiences.

[2] Father Baker knew the *Cloud* only in the sixteenth-century recension, and his judgement refers to that text. It will be noticed that his citations from the *Cloud* do not always agree with the text given in this edition;

been first penned in the English tongue as we have it. It may well be there be copies of it in England, and one I am sure there is, at this time, in the possession of one of our Fathers there. It hath never as yet been printed, whereof the reason probably is the sublimeness of the matter, being unfit for many to read, and few being able to understand it. And accordingly the author himself doth in the latter end of the treatise advise him for whom he wrote it, to be wary to whom he did impart it. And thus did Saint Denis advise in one of his works written to Timothy, bidding him take heed that no unfitting persons should see what he had then written to him. This course is thought fit to be held about mystic books, because all are not fit to read them. And it may be questioned whether they be fit at all to be printed and published. At least I do not think that our present treatise hath ever as yet been printed.

Who the author of it was is unknown, at least to me. His humility would not permit him to put his name to it. And that he was of a humble spirit appeareth not only by his so concealing his name, but also by the spirit and manner of his writing. And especially by this, that he avoideth the ostentation of citing authors, as he professeth that of set purpose he doth,[1] and handleth his high matter in a very simple and unaffected manner, and in usual and homely words; but yet sufficient to express his meaning, so far as the difficulty of the matter would permit him. And we may well conceive that he was endued with humility, who was come to such experience in matters of the spirit; and there is no doubt but that he wrote it chiefly out of the experience he had had in himself, and otherwise could not have written what he hath done and as he hath done.

This copy of the book that we have in this house was written in the year 1582, and it seemeth to have been truly and carefully written by him, whoever he were, that so copied it. It is said that the whole volume, wherein this copy is inserted, belonged to the private library of Father Benet Fitch, our countryman, the Capuchin, author of the book called *The Will of God*; and that upon his

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serious discrepancies have been removed, but I have not thought it necessary or advisable to rewrite the citations according to the primitive text.

[1] *Cloud*, Chap. 70.

death it was found among other books in his library.[1] And it is plain that some mystic man or other was owner of it; for it containeth nothing but mystic matters in it: some in English, some in French, and some in Latin. And I conjecture that the said Father Benet Fitch became a Capuchin about the year 1582, and perhaps did so copy it himself, or caused it to be copied by some other. It is said that the copy, from which our said copy was taken, was brought over into these parts out of England by the English Carthusians, when they forsook their country upon the schism of King Henry the Eighth.[2]

Finally, somehow, through the providence of God, the book is

[1] William Fitch, in religion Father Benet, born 1563 at Canfield in Essex, studied law at the Middle Temple, but being converted to the Church left England for Douai. He took the Capuchin habit at Paris in 1586, and returning to England as a priest was arrested and spent three years in prison for his priesthood. He was released at the intercession of Henri IV and returned to Paris, where he died, 1611. He became known as a mystic in the earliest years of his religious life, and afterwards exerted a great influence in the renaissance of French mysticism. Bremond (*Hist. litt. du sentiment religieux en France*, ii. p. 155 ff.) regards him as the prime figure in this renaissance and describes him as the "master of the masters themselves". His only printed work seems to be the *Règle de perfection réduite au seul point de la volonté divine*. The English edition (Rouen, 1609) is entitled: *The Rule of Perfection, containing a Brief and Perspicuous Abridgement of all the Whole Spiritual Life reduced to this only Point of the Will of God*. The work is in three parts, but the third and most advanced part is not in the English edition. The author has sometimes been charged with quietism, but the charge is shown by Bremond to be without foundation.

[2] On 4 May 1535, the three Carthusian Priors (John Houghton of London, Robert Lawrence of Beauvale, and Augustus Webster of Axholme) were hanged at Tyburn, and many of their brethren later followed them to the scaffold or died in Newgate. Some escaped abroad, and these exiles founded an English Charterhouse in the Low Countries, first at Bruges, and finally at Nieuport. The leader of these exiles was Maurice Chauncey, which name is attached to the Parkminster MS. of the *Cloud* but not as the name of the author of the *Cloud*, as Anthony Wood misread the notice. It is clear otherwise that the *Cloud* was a favourite book with the English Carthusians, and Father Baker's report in the text is an exceedingly probable one. It is not unlikely—though this is conjecture—that these Carthusians published the sixteenth-century recension.

come to this house; God enable you to understand it and to make right use of it! For I esteem it to be an excellent book, for those that understand it, and for everyone that reads it, so far as he understands it and doth not pretend to understand more of it than indeed he doth.

To none of you that give yourselves to prayer and to the reading of good books would I forbid the reading of this book; but do rather commend unto you the reading of it. Only I exhort and advise you, that ye be sure to hold the like course about the reading of this book which I have ever advised you to hold about other books, which is: that what you do not understand, you trouble yourselves no more about it; but understand when you may; which perhaps in time you will, after more experience in a spiritual life, and after more reading of other books, and oftener reading of this book itself. And for what ye think ye do understand, take heed how ye put the same in practice upon yourselves. Observe your own way, spirit, and call; and of books, take and practise according as you shall find to be proper and answerable to such way, spirit, and call of yours; and no more or further. And doing so, you may almost by all kinds of spiritual books receive comfort, or other good, and no manner of harm. Whereas if ye do not hold such a course about what ye read, it were better that ye read nothing at all, but only observed your spirit and call, as ever have done those good souls—and many such there have been—that never could read books, or had none to read, and yet attained to great perfection and sanctity.

Read this book whoso of you will; but, whoso shall read it, let her do it with the said wariness that I have advised. The book in itself is an excellent book, the which makes me speak so much about it and to take the pains I shall take in expounding some of the difficult places of it. Some of you probably will understand it better than others, and none of you will there be but will understand something in it that will be a light or comfort unto her.

Your experience had in yourselves by prosecution of prayer will, I make no doubt, much enlighten you for the understanding of this book, you being souls on whom God hath bestowed an aptness and a calling to a contemplative course. And surely without such aptness and experience, little good use or right understanding can you or any others have of such mystic books. But having in you the said

aptness, and proceeding daily in the exercise of prayer, you will gather much experience and light for the understanding of these matters. And God also, to such well-minded and industrious souls, doth usually add a light that exceedeth both their natural aptness and their experience. The reading also of other books from time to time, with your observation of what you read, will increase in you light and ability for better understanding of these matters. And therefore I would wish that at least once in every two years you take this book called the *Cloud* for your private reading book, and read it twice or thrice over; and I hope you will every time understand it better than you did before. And withal if you read what I shall write upon the said book called the *Cloud*, it may be you will thereby also help your understanding of it. And though I shall forbear to take on me the office of an expositor in all the difficult places of the book, yet shall I now and then, according to occasion, expound some things. But for the most part my endeavour shall be to make some notes and observations, which may be for your use and benefit.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

Of other authors who have handled the same matter

THE author—for aught that I can find—was the first that hath delivered us the exercise of a mystic life in such plenty and clearness of words as the same may be expressed. Madriliensis—who wrote the book called *The Method to Serve God* and by some *Alphonsus*—writeth somewhat of the matter of this book; but it is very little that he speaketh of it.[1] And that he doth in the chapter on the Love of God, where he showeth how angelical an exercise is the exercise

[1] Alphonsus Madriliensis was a Spanish Franciscan, perhaps from the little town of Madrigal in Old Castile. The Bodleian possesses two copies of a Latin version of the work referred to in the text, published respectively at Ingolstadt (1578) and Cologne (1608). The work is entitled *Libellus aureus de vera Deo apte inserviendi methodo, jam olim Hispanice editus a F. Alfonso Madriliensi, nunc autem in Latinum traductus per F. Johan. Hentenium, in Academia Lovaniensi S. Theologiae professorem.* The translator was the Dominican Prior of Louvain, and he dedicates his translation (1560) to Abbot Blosius.

of the love of God, the which, saith he, is by acts of the will; and divers of such acts towards God he there specifieth. But indeed, to my seeming, he is very short, not only as to the writing, but also as to the apprehending of the nature of the exercise handled by our author of the *Cloud*. For it seemeth to me that Madriliensis goes no further than usually do scholastic divines, whose teaching is far different from that which the experienced mystics deliver unto us.

Both he and scholastic divines do seem to make the perfect exercise of love in this life to consist in a quiet aspect towards God, perfectly joying in his felicity as if it were the man's own, and congratulating the same; the which kind of perfect exercise is not, as I conceive, attained to in this life. For the highest exercise of this life is but an elevation of the will, by which it willeth God to be that which he is, without any such aspect of God, or of any attribute of his, otherwise than according to the confused and general knowledge of him that our faith ministreth to us. Nor is there in such exercise any such actual joying in the felicity of God, as scholastic divines do suppose; yet in some sort, or in effect, it is the same kind of love or exercise which they intend. And what I have said about the manner of love exercised as mystics do describe, is confirmed by the aforesaid book of Father Benet Fitch, in the third part, where he hath the words: *Quia Deus est*, and *Quia Deus vult*; "because God is," or "because God wills." And so they are as it were certain forced, but very facile, elevations of the will, that pushes itself up blindly towards God, without any special aspect of him or of any attribute or felicity of his, and without any express complacency in him or in anything in him, but with a conformity of the party's will to the will of God in all things. And indeed of this nature I esteem the highest exercise commended throughout the *Cloud* to be: which is that the soul do bluntly or blindly heave itself up towards God, apprehended only according to the general notion of faith, and so do apply and unite itself unto him, without any other aspect of him, or any such joyous regard of him, as they do imagine who are acquainted only with exercises of sense and with sensible love.

For these men do imagine the perfect love of God to be exercised according to the manner that a mother would exercise her love and affection towards her only child, being one that had in it all natural graces and talents that could move and deserve love. For the mother

—who perhaps had not seen him for a long time before—looks upon him with an amorous aspect, and for a long time together feeds herself with such looking on him, joying in him and in her having so fair and gracious a child; and she wisheth to it all the happiness her heart can conceive, and willingly she would never give over such looking on him, but would continually feed herself with the sight of him, if that her other necessities would permit her, as they will not.

After this manner (I say) do those that are not experienced in truly spiritual exercises esteem of them; whereas indeed they are not so, but are in the other manner which I have before specified, which is in elevating and pushing up of the will—but with very great quietness and facility—towards God, bluntly and blindly. And this is without other use of the understanding than by taking into it the notion of God, apprehended only according to faith, and then applying the will to God, and holding it fast unto him, so long as corporeal frailty will permit. And in so doing there is none of the foresaid complacence, joying, or congratulating, actually exercised.

And regard this that I have now said; for such elevation and application of the will to God I take to be the perfection of the work that is so much commended throughout the whole course of the treatise called the *Cloud*. But yet there is in this life a certain love of complacence in God and in his felicity, that even very imperfect souls sometimes in their exercises have and use, as I have expressed more fully in my treatise called *Remains*. But such exercise of love is very imperfect and much—if not for the greatest part—intermingled with a natural love we bear towards God; and it falleth very short of the exercise of perfect love which is exercised in the superior soul, and is chiefly or only handled in our present treatise called the *Cloud*.

The next that I have met with who wrote of this matter is the aforesaid Father Benet Fitch, in the third book of *The Will of God*, which was in the year 1610. And after him—namely, in the year 1624—did the author of *Secrets Sentiers*[1] set out the same book of

[1] Constantin de Barbanson, a Belgian Capuchin (1582–1631), was a pioneer of his Order in Germany. The work referred to in the text is *Secrets Sentiers de l'Amour Divin*, Cologne, 1623, and translated into German and Latin. The Latin version bears the title: *Amoris divini occultae semitae*,

his. The which third book of *The Will of God* and the said book of *Secrets Sentiers* are of the same effect as is our book of the *Cloud*; though to those that are inexperienced they would not seem to be so, but to be different exercises. I will endeavour to show as much, in some places expounding the *Cloud* and reconciling it with those two authors, especially with the said book of *The Will of God*, the best I can.

The truth is that all mystic writers, in expressment of the spiritual course they have run, do seem to differ wholly one from another, whereas all the difference—if matters were rightly understood—is but the difference in words and terms, and not in matter. The reason of their seeming difference is that spiritual matters can very hardly, if at all, be expressed in sensible words, there being no set proper words serving for the purpose. But being desirous to express themselves the best they can, they use such terms as they imagine may best serve for it, and each one doth according to his own manner.

And if the spiritual exercises of a man, wherein he is the agent (which do ever somewhat partake of body and sense, so long as the soul is united to the body), be so hard to be understood by others (at least by those that are inexperienced in these exercises), how hard is it, or rather how impossible, to express the spiritual works whereof God is the agent and the soul but patient? For God being a spirit, and his working being in the pure spirit of the man abstracted from the bodily senses, therefore the work is merely spiritual, and so in no way to be expressed. For which reason principally (as I conceive) our author of the *Cloud* hath wisely forborne to handle these passive exercises, and only taketh on him to express those exercises of love which the soul herself (howsoever helped or moved by God) worketh, and whereof she is the only or principal agent.

And yet what he doth therein he doth even it in a certain general

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auctore R.P.F. Constantino de Barbanson, praedicatore Capucino et conventus Coloniensis Guardiano (Cologne, 1623). Father Baker has selections from *Secrets Sentiers* translated in *Secretum* and in his MS. *Collectionx out of Divers Authors*. See *The Secret Paths of Divine Love*, London, 1928. There is a modern edition of the French original, published by Desclée (Tournai, 1932).

manner, as saying: *that the soul heaves herself up by a blind stirring of love*. But how, or in what manner she doth *heave herself up*, he neither doth nor is able to express. And accordingly saith Harphius[1] that the consurrection of the superior powers—which is but the same blind motion of love—can very hardly, or not at all, be expressed by words, nor be understood by those that are inexperienced therein; and that by reason of the subtlety and spirituality of such working.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

That God leadeth souls by two ways, an ordinary and an extraordinary

Two sorts of ways there be by which God calleth and guideth souls towards his perfect love—that is to say, an *ordinary* and an *extraordinary* way. The ordinary is that which is contained in the present treatise called the *Cloud*, and in the foresaid authors: Father Benet Fitch, *Secrets Sentiers*, Blosius,[2] and some others. And though I call the way of all these authors *ordinary*, yet is there much variety in the manner that God holds with souls in that same ordinary way. The variety consists in the nature of their exercises, and in the efficaciousness thereof. As for example: Some use more meditation or discourse than others do; some are longer than others in the exercise of immediate acts or aspirations, and accordingly do attain sooner or later to the mystic union. And that is partly or chiefly according to the measure of grace or enablement that God yields in

[1] Henry Herp, a Franciscan of the Low Countries who died in 1478. His chief mystical work is his *Theologia Mystica*, published in full at Cologne in 1538, which had a considerable vogue. Father Baker esteemed it much, terming the author a "very elevate spirit". It is to this work that he refers here, and he translates passages from it in his *Collections*.

[2] Ludovicus Blosius (Louis de Blois), Benedictine Abbot of Liessies (1506–66). Born of a noble family of Hainault, he became Abbot of Liessies at the age of twenty-four. He succeeded in reforming the observance of the abbey, and became widely known for his spiritual writings, especially for his *Mirror for Monks*. Father Baker translates a chapter of his *Institutions* in *Secretum*, and there are manuscript versions of several of the books (including the *Mirror*) which are probably his.

the business, yielding to some more and to some others less, according to his own good pleasure. And partly it depends upon the industry and seriousness of the party in prosecution of his spiritual exercises and mortifications. Others there be whom God calleth and hasteneth in the said way by means of corporal mortifications, or by some other afflictions and crosses, which he permitteth to fall on them, and which together with the serious pursuit of prayer do much hasten them to the attaining of the perfect love of God. And in these and in some other points doth the variety of the ordinary way consist. And I call it *ordinary* because it is the way by which God usually calleth and guideth those souls whom he would have to attain to his perfect love.

The extraordinary way is that by which he calleth some special souls, as he did Saint Catharine of Siena, Saint Teresa, and divers others, especially of the sex of women, with whom he did not hold the ordinary course that he holds with others, but called them to divers graces and favours, when they had little or nothing disposed themselves for the deserving or receiving of the same. But God did much, or the greatest part, of what he did towards them, merely of his own free will and liberality, doing to them extraordinary favours, as we read in the stories of their lives. And so God did not hold with them the ordinary and usual course that he holdeth with others, whom he calleth and guideth as it were by a more certain and set way, without any great varying. Whereas the courses he held with these other special souls were not only different from those of ordinary good souls, but also from one another's courses.

And thus, I say, hath God dealt, and may yet deal when he pleases, with some souls after an extraordinary manner. And therefore their exercises and doings are no proper examples or patterns for us much to look into, and less to imitate. But we are to look after the ordinary way and the exercises thereof, being those that are handled in the authors before mentioned by me, and especially in our present treatise of the *Cloud*. And if God will call any of us, or any other, by an extraordinary way, neither we nor they shall need the examples or instructions of books for the same, having such a teacher and worker as God is, who can teach us all things and work in us as he shall please. But if he do not call us by an extraordinary way—we as are not to expect that he will—we are to walk by the

ordinary way. And it will be good for us to be acquainted with the books that describe the same, of which kind is the present treatise of the *Cloud* in a high degree. Those extraordinary saints God prevented with his graces and favours; but we must after a manner prevent him by our industries, together with his grace.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

That this book is written for contemplatives, and who should practise its teaching

Our author of the *Cloud* doth not meddle with the exercises of the active life, but begins with the contemplative exercise, and prosecutes it, and shows that it is to be prosecuted by us, not only to the end of our lives, but even for all eternity in heaven. But with this difference: that there we contemplate God face to face, which is as he is in his essence, and answerably love him with a greater love. But here in this life we contemplate him in his creatures, as they do who use meditation. Or else by certain *species* or images infused by God into our souls, or by the images that already are therein, which he maketh in some manner to represent himself unto the soul. And this is acted in the passive union, the which of all exercises breedeth in the soul the greatest love towards God. Or else the soul contemplates God with the light of faith only, as they do that pursue the exercise of the will that is treated of throughout this book called the *Cloud*. And as the love caused by the passive exercise is inferior to the love that is caused in heaven, by the real sight of God there; and as the love caused by the exercise of the will in the light of faith is inferior to that which is wrought by the passive exercises; so is the love raised by meditation inferior to that which is produced in the light of faith. And when the soul produceth her aspirations or elevations by interior motions and enablement from God, the work is ever more efficacious than the man's own work can be, when he useth meditation or forceth himself to acts.

And where I have said that the passive exercise worketh for the present more love than do the aspirations or elevations (wherein the soul herself is the agent, though by interior motion or enable-

ment from God), I say that the same passive exercise doth also enable the soul for the future to produce far more efficacious aspirations and elevations than it did or could do before the said passive contemplation. And that enablement for future elevations is the fruit or good effect of such passive exercise. For if it had not such effect or fruit, the same passive exercise were little profitable to our soul. For our merit consisteth upon our own acts (though with the assistance of God's grace), and not in the acts or doings wherein God is the principal agent, or only doer, and we but the patient.

Our author of the *Cloud*, I say, meddles not with the exercise of the active life, whereof he puts two sorts or degrees, the one higher than the other: making meditation to be the higher, and corporal labours the lower. But he begins with contemplative exercises, whereof I put immediate acts in the first and lowest place, and next above them aspirations and elevations, which our author intendeth under the term of *blind stirring of love*. And in that same blind stirring he makes the soul to walk and exercise during her life, but growing more spiritual herein and more elevate from sense. And he putteth the forepart of contemplative exercises (which is that of immediate acts) to be by call unto it by God. And therefore it seemeth to him that one is to continue in his exercises of the active life, being those of much corporal labour and meditation, until he finds himself called by God to those contemplative exercises. And such call to change will appear by two tokens, which our author delivers. Whereof the one is when the party finds his soul to be delivered from much felt remorse for sins past, and to have within him a certain at-onement, or peace with God, as to all former sins, or as to any present deliberate affection to creatures. The other token is a certain disgust in meditation (having before found some aptness in himself for it) and better disposition or aptness for immediate acts. He who finds these tokens in him is to esteem himself called from active exercise to contemplative. But he who doth not find these tokens within him, let him still continue in the said exercises of the active life, though it be never so long—yea, though it be for his whole lifetime—till he be called to the aforesaid contemplative exercises; the which calling he shall discern by the aforesaid tokens.

And those that cannot, nor ever could meditate (I mean use discursive prayer), let them out of necessity—have they a call or no call, for ought seemeth to them—put themselves even at the first to the exercise of immediate acts and hold themselves thereunto till that God call them out of it, be it ever or never.

Therefore the work of this book is not for all men, but is only for them that are well disposed and prepared for it by former exercises, and are also invited or called out of them by God. Which call or invitation they must note and observe in themselves and correspond thereunto. And till they have such invitation or enablement they must continue in their foresaid exercises of the active life. And therefore whosoever upon reading of this book of the *Cloud* would of his own head put himself to the exercise of the work therein so much commended, he would but utterly deceive himself. Yea! if God do not put and bring him into the work—which God doth not but by many degrees—he can never understand what the work is which our author meaneth; and therefore how can he rightly hit on it? But he will fall into some fond work or other, according to his own brain or imagination, the which cannot bring him to any good end. And therefore, to be able to perform the work so much commended by the author of the *Cloud*, the man must dispose himself by former exercises, and must await the divine call and enablement.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

Of the substance of this book

THE whole course and process of our present book called the *Cloud* is but a prosecution of the exercise of the will, as a man would say: *from top to toe*, excluding all discourse, meditation, and consideration further than the same shall be merely necessary. And he supposeth such discourse not to be much necessary, but only in the beginning of the spiritual life. For afterwards—and that so soon as may be—he would have the party to betake and tie himself only to the exercise of the will, casting away all reasoning and discoursing, the which are acted in the imagination and by the understanding, and holding on only in the exercise of the will. And therein and

thereby he groweth more and more spiritual—I mean in his exercise, the same becoming more and more elevate and abstracted from the senses of the body, and from the images and loves of creatures—and so passeth into God, choosing him and his love and will for his own sake, and adhering therein and thereto. And our author supposeth that the party, after that it is grown time for the laying aside of meditation, should use some force (so far as he should need such forcement of his will), and afterwards in time should come to be able to exercise the same will out of an interior impulse, motion, and information from God, the which he calleth *stirring*. For what is stirring but motion? And he calleth it a *blind stirring*, because it is without use of the understanding, the which is termed the eye of the soul. And he calleth such exercise a *stirring of love*, because the soul thereby heaveth herself up towards God, out of the interior affection she hath towards him, choosing him and seeking after him for his sake. And so her doing therein proceedeth out of love, and tendeth to increase of love. And indeed all this exercise of the will, thus prosecuted throughout this book, is in effect and substance but the self-same course of spiritual life which I have so much intimated and inculcated to you by word of mouth and by writing under the terms of *immediate acts*, *proper aspirations*, and *elevations of the will*.

And thus, I say, you are to conceive that those mystic authors, whom I have before mentioned, being Father Fitch and *Secrets Sentiers*, and my own simple writings also, are for matter and substance but the self-same as is the book called the *Cloud*, though all of us do express our matter and meanings in various terms. But the reader is with his judgement to reconcile all those terms, drawing them all into one meaning as to the matter and substance of what is intended by them.

Blosius goes not so particularly into this exercise of the will. He only puts one at first into meditation, or into the exercise of immediate acts, as he doth in the tenth and eleventh chapters of his *Institutions*; and wills the party to prosecute the same exercise of immediate acts, and they will bring him, saith he, to the mystic union. And so he tells nothing of the exercises that occur between those immediate acts and the mystic union; which I say are proper aspirations and elevations. But indeed Blosius may be understood to

imply them and their exercise in that general instruction of his, where he adviseth the soul, that had begun the said exercise of immediate acts, not to be rigid therein, but flexible and yielding to changes, when it should be time for such changes. And this means that the party should cease from acts, when she comes to be moved to aspirations, and lay aside aspirations for elevations, when it shall be time for it; and cease from all aspirations, elevations, and other activities of her own, yielding to the divine passive operation, when it shall be time for it. The which passive operation the said Blosius doth describe and handle in the next chapter—that is, the twelfth—of his *Institutions*.

The work, therefore, which is treated of in this book is the exercise of proper aspirations, growing more and more spiritual and becoming elevations, which are a more sublime exercise, more elevate from sense, and so more spiritual. And the exercise of such a one (so long as he abideth in it, and it abideth in him) groweth more subtle, more easy, and more above sense; so that at length it cometh to be an operation purely in spirit, and becometh more and more purely in spirit, and more above and without sense, increasing in such purity and spirituality while he liveth. Of such exercise I have at large treated in the book G, under the title of *Intellectual Operations*, which I there reduce to *aspirations* and *elevations*.

All those aspirations and elevations are the work so much and only commended in the book of the *Cloud*.

Meditation and immediate acts are not within the list of the works treated of in the book of the *Cloud*. For though meditation and acts be necessary means and dispositions for attaining to the said work, yet are they not the work itself. The work itself is termed, and indeed it is, a contemplative exercise. For indeed it is a contemplation: that which I usually term a *mystic active contemplation*. For although the exercise of acts draw nearer to contemplation than does meditation (which hath discourse in it, which acts have not), yet acts, as well as meditation, necessarily have images in them. And our author utterly excludeth images out of his work. But he must and doth allow the use of images till God calls the man to aspirations; and then he leaveth off all the images which he was driven to use in the exercise of meditation and acts.

And after God hath called one out of meditation and acts into

aspirations, so that he is enabled by God, and through his former exercises of meditation and acts, to use them, yet it may well be (as our author supposeth and other authors also) that the ability of aspirations will fail him, and that he will be driven now and then, for want of such ability, to betake himself to his former exercise of meditation and acts, till God do again enable him for aspirations. And it is likely that in time he will come to be so habituated in the use of aspirations, that he shall never again be driven to descend to meditation or acts.

This exercise of aspirations hath a huge variety or extent. Under them I include a wonderful variety of spiritual active operations. And our author of the *Cloud* also includeth them all under the term of the *work* so much commended by him, making no degrees, varieties, nor distinctions. Nor will I make any other than those I have already made unto you of aspirations and elevations.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

Of aspirations and the mystic union

THE aspirations of which we have spoken are an exercise by which we immediately aspire to a perfect union with God. In the aspirations themselves there is much good love and a kind of union; but there is not in them perfect love or perfect union. The aspirations are a certain greedy longing or thirsting after God out of love; but when the soul is come to be united to him, then do they cease: she being come to enjoy and possess that Good which by her aspirations she aspired and tended unto. But such union ceasing—for it doth not always last—she reneweth her aspirations, by them aspiring to a new union. The which perfect union consisteth in the coupling of the powers of the soul by love and affection to the Spirit of God, all images of creatures for the time being driven and held without. And although the perfect felicity of this life doth consist in that perfect union and possession of God, yet is there an imperfect felicity even in those aspirations by which one tendeth and aspireth to that perfect union.

And here I will tell you the cause why the aforesaid exercise of the soul is called *aspirations*. Even as he who labours to be a king, or to

attain to any place or office of dignity or honour, is said to aspire, which is to seek upwards: so a soul, by the exercise of those aspirations, doth seek and labour to get out of her inferior nature and to attain to the height or top of the spirit, where God more properly is and dwelleth, to the end she may there be perfectly united to him; and such seeking to get up and tendance towards God is—and that rightly—called and termed an aspiring, and aspirations are the exercise of such aspiring. But when that the soul is attained to the said height or top of the spirit and is there united to God, so long as she remaineth in such union she cannot be said to aspire; because her aspiring, or as it were ambition, is for that time at an end, she being in possession of what she aspired unto. But such union not being in this life stable or permanent, but the soul being through frailty of the body driven to descend, she after such descent doth again aspire to a new union by means of the foresaid exercise of aspirations.

But in a miserable case are those souls who do not so much as tend towards that union, nor are in the way for it. For such souls are altogether unsatisfied; and if they be religious, then commonly they are less satisfied than if they be people of the world. For those seculars do take some satisfaction in the liberty of nature which they have. But religious commonly are by the nature of their Order, and by the laws and restraints thereof, restricted in satisfying the desires of their natures. And yet, not being possessed of God, nor aspiring towards him, they share neither in God nor in the pleasures and liberty of nature. And so they are unhappy and unsatisfied, both in respect of soul and of body, and in respect of God and of nature. And therefore God send us and put into us the foresaid spiritual ambition, which consisteth in aspiring towards God and seeking union with him, with daily increase in straitness and purity therein; according to which is our happiness in the present life and shall be the happiness of the future.

I make no difference between aspiration and elevation, but that elevation doth signify a greater subtlety or spirituality, and a nearer approachment to a union than doth aspiration. But yet the word aspiration may comprehend in it elevation; for what the soul doth in such tendance towards a union may be termed an aspiring. And so I commonly term all those spiritual tendencies to be aspirations;

whereof there be almost infinite varieties and degrees, some of them being purer and more elevate from sense than others, according to the progress in spirit made by the soul.

The work of love, being the matter of our book called the *Cloud*, compriseth in it both the said aspirations and elevations by which a soul tends and aspires to union, and also the union itself. And the said union I intend to be an active union. For as to the passive union, our author professeth that he will not treat of it, as being a matter too high for him to undertake the expressment thereof.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

A further discourse concerning acts and aspirations

And here I must tell you some things for the better understanding of what I have said and yet shall say, as also of some sayings of our author in certain places of his book.

The *first* is, that whereas I have told you that our author intends his work to be only of aspirations and not of acts, I must therein correct or at least explain myself. And therefore I say that his meaning extends to acts also, but in some cases only. For instance, while a soul has much remorse of conscience for sins present or past, by which he is more drawn to look upon his sins, bewail them, and purpose amendment of them, than to look immediately upon God or to use acts of resignation towards him: during that time he is not so apt for the work of immediate love or resignation towards God. But if that soul—as is the common case with young souls, especially women—hath no great guilt by past sins, or having been a great sinner hath now by the exercise of meditation or acts come to some amendment of life, with a resolute will of serving God better, and a certain peace of conscience with regard to past sin: such a one may, according to our author's meaning, pass from acts of sorrow for sin to acts of resignation or of immediate love towards God. And these acts of resignation or immediate love are included within the work so much treated of by our author. But the former acts about sins, wherein he would have the soul tarry until it feel remorse for sin diminished within it and succeeded by a certain aptness and boldness to treat more familiarly with God, are not

included in the work. That this is his meaning may plainly be gathered from many passages.

And so you must not think that he speaks only of proper aspirations; for these do not lie in man's power to exercise at his pleasure, but depend upon the power of God, who moves and enables the soul to them. And yet it is true that there is a call from God from acts of sorrow for sins to acts of resignation or other love, and God interiorly is an inviter or mover to such change, as he is an inviter and director to and in the exercise of proper aspirations.

However, the less discourse or use of images there is in the exercise, the nearer doth it draw to the perfection of the work treated of by our author. Meditation is full of discourse and of images of creatures, and therefore meditation is not of the nature of this work. Consideration or sorrow about sins hath also in it images of creatures, and therefore neither is that exercise within the scope of this work. Acts of resignation or other love, exercised by one that is ripe for such exercise or called to it, although they have images of creatures in them at the beginning, partake more of our author's work of love. For the soul doth not tarry in such images, but presently passeth out of them to God. But the exercise of proper aspirations, proceeding out of interior motion from God, after the soul has been long exercised in immediate acts of love, so that it has acquired an habitual and solid affection: this is the true and proper work of love which our author chiefly intendeth throughout his whole book.

Secondly, even as one who is in meditation, or in acts of sorrow about sin, doth in time pass thence into acts of resignation or love, so doth he, whom God may call and enable, pass in time from this last degree into the exercise of aspirations.

Thirdly, although the author speaks only in a generality of a *blind stirring* or springing *of love*, yet we must understand that there may be many varieties or changes in these exercises, according to the invitation or motion of God. And a soul may sometimes be driven to return to an inferior exercise which he had left. There is an almost infinite variety of aspirations, but the changes one out of another are unspeakable, and therefore our author discreetly forbore to speak of them. The soul herself must observe her calls and enablements therein.

Fourthly, whereas our author often speaketh of *pressing down and keeping* all images of creatures under the *cloud of forgetting*, this practice is more proper to the exercise of acts of love or resignation than to the exercise of aspirations or elevations. For in the latter the soul is more helped by God in what she doth than in the former, wherein she more useth her own industry. And distractive thoughts of creatures either do not come at all, or, if they do come, affect only the understanding or imagination, and not the will. Nevertheless, in both exercises, all thoughts of creatures that occur to the mind are to be kept down under foot, or, as our author says, under the *cloud of forgetting*.

Fifthly, it is nothing strange but very frequent that souls do soon pass out of acts of sorrow for sin into acts of love and resignation, although the longer and deeper men have been in such sins the longer is it likely to be before they are ripe for such passage. So there is no set time when one is to pass out of such sorrow for sin into acts of love, but each one must regard the state of his own soul and conscience. If he find therein the aforesaid quietness and peace, either in fulness or in some reasonable measure, then may he make that passage. But those who are of good wills and of fearful or scrupulous natures, and who would of their own inclination tarry and feed themselves in this sorrow for sin, these are not to wait for that peace of conscience, but should speedily pass into acts of resignation or other acts of love towards God.

The said exercise of sorrow for sins is commonly called the *purgative way*, and some pass sooner out of it than others. To some a very few days in it are enough; to others a few weeks; to others, a few months. None, I think, will need to tarry in it so long as one whole year's space, if he be one that hath a good will and follows his spiritual course with any seriousness. Some there be—especially among women—that, being but young in years, are so innocent in the state of their consciences and so well affected towards God, that they may soon pass into the acts of resignation or other acts of love. But for passing thence into aspirations—that is, to have one's whole exercise of them—a far longer time is required. Even beginners may come forth with an aspiration now and then, and it is not marvellous that one should soon be able to do that; but to have

one's whole exercise or most of it of them, that may not be without a long abode previously in the exercise of acts.

Some are called sooner than others out of such exercise of acts into the exercise of aspirations; and some are called to such a change by little and little, aspirations gaining ground more and more over acts till in time the whole exercise come to consist of aspirations, and that stably and permanently. Others there be who are suddenly, and as it were at one instant, called to an entire change, and from a total exercise of acts to a total exercise of aspirations. Others there be whom God permitteth, not only for many years, but even perhaps for all the days of their life, to abide in the exercise of acts. And they must content themselves with such condition, it being very pleasing to God and sufficiently profitable to themselves.

And you must ever know that the exercise of aspirations doth arise out of a good habitual affection, founded and grounded in the soul by long use and exercise of acts of resignation or other love. So that those aspirations do not arise out of any premeditation, study, or invention of the party, but from the good habit that hath been wrought in the soul by the said precedent, long continued exercise of acts. And now God, by means of the said habit, is become the inventor, suggester, and director of the said aspirations, and the party is as it were but God's instrument in the business, God moving and directing the will of the party, and the party accordingly venting and coming forth with the aspirations in such order as it pleaseth God. And thus you see that no one can put himself into this exercise of aspirations; but he may and doth put himself into the exercise of acts and abideth in them.

Sixthly, whereas I have said that in passive contemplations God presents himself by some *species* or other, you must not understand that I mean it of *all* contemplations. For there be passive contemplations wherein God doth not present himself except by his work. God doth but work in the soul, as if you would mould bread, working and turmoiling the soul, as if he would by such work of his frame her anew, causing and creating in her all virtues, reforming her after this unspeakable manner, and (as some term it) baptizing her and renewing her in the Holy Ghost.

All these passive contemplations, which be infinite in variety, are called *contemplations*, though perhaps not properly. For contempla-

tion signifies an aspect or sight of the understanding, and not the suffering of the work of God, the which properly is called the *inaction* of God.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

That this work is very various, yet hath certain fixed characters

And there is great variety of these works and many degrees in them, and in divers manners do souls exercise them. Yet, for all that, they all of them agree in certain points, and therein are all alike.

And *first* they agree in this: that all that the soul doth is by the will. I mean that it is the will that goes foremost and makes the breach, and the understanding doth but follow, or at least accompany the will. The will is the guide and captain, and the understanding doth but attend the will, going whither he goes and following him.

Secondly, the understanding so accompanying the will is to carry with it no images or *species* of created things, be they never so noble, but she is to shake them all off, the best she can, and is to retain only an apprehension and memory of God, according to that totality that our faith tells us of him. She is to cast all images out of doors, and to keep them out—yea, even all particular images of God himself or of any attribute of his—and to admit only a general notion or remembrance of God, wherein yet the soul doth not tarry, but speedily with her will passeth into or towards that same God. And thus, by and with such aspirations, she doth transcend all images and created things whatsoever, aspiring to the union of the Creator himself, who is without any image, and is the more perfectly had and found, by how much all images both of him and of all creatures are cashiered and done away out of the memory of the soul.

And the knowledge of God then retained by the soul is by the removing of all created things from him; which done, there remaineth as it were nothing; the which nothing is all that we can know of him in this life. And that is when we see that he is nothing of those things that may be comprehended by our senses or understandings. And because we cannot for all that know what God is, therefore is such a case called by our author the *cloud of unknowing*.

For after we have cast off all images of created things, finding none of them, nor all together, to be God, yet do we not see what God is in his essence. We see what he is not, but we see not what he is. We see that none of those created things which we have cast off is God; but the nothing which we see remaining is not truly God. Yet it is the nearest sight that we have in this life of God. In that same nothing only is God to be seen in this life; the sight of him as he is in his essence is reserved for the future life.

And when the soul is come into the sight of the said nothing, then is she come into the *cloud of unknowing* so much spoken of by our author. For, being within that *cloud* she sees not, nor knows, what God truly is, yet she sees him far better than she saw him before she entered into that *cloud of unknowing*. For before she was in her interior so bepainted with creatures, that she could see nothing but them, and her senses did in some sort regard them as if they were God. But they and these images being driven out of her soul, she without impediment seeth God, as he is to be seen in this life: which is that she seeth him to be no created thing, but to be an uncreated and unlimited thing. And the longer she abideth in this *cloud*, and more beateth on it, the more clear doth the aforesaid nothing appear. I mean, that the images of created things are more and more driven away; and consequently the more perfect is the sight of God according to the manner that he is to be seen in this life.

The transcending of creatures with their images, which I mention in this place, is but the very self-same thing which our author often mentioneth, terming the same the *cloud of forgetting*; which is, that in the said exercise of aspirations we do and must, so far as we can, do away and refuse all images of creatures whatsoever.

Thirdly, all those several kinds and varieties of aspirations and elevations that are comprised in the work treated of in the *Cloud* do agree in this: that they proceed not merely from the man's own head, will, or election, but from the divine interior motion, intimation, and instruction, as before I have told you. It is true that the man is the agent in it; but he doth it by motion from God, who moveth his will to do it and teacheth him how to do it: in some sort as a writing master doth move and guide the hand of his young scholar when he teacheth him to write. And therefore, in such a case, there is a double call from God. The first call is that God in-

citeth, moveth, and enableth the soul, without any discourse or motive of reason for it, to break forth immediately into such aspirations or elevations. The second call is for the manner: which is that God teacheth the soul what kind of aspirations she is to use, and in what manner to exercise them. Whereas they who are in meditation or acts do make their own choice what kind and in what manner they are to use their meditation, or to come forth with their acts. And commonly they have to search and do a little study for the matter and manner of their meditation or acts.

Fourthly, they agree in this: that never doth God call or enable a soul to the exercise of them—I mean to make their whole exercise of them—without precedent exercise of meditation or acts, as before I have affirmed. I know God could, if he pleased, bring a spiritual scholar, even on the first day that he enters into the school, into the said exercise of aspirations and settle him there; but that were a very extraordinary favour, and such a one as he never useth to bestow on any. And therefore was it that St Bernard said that contemplation without precedent meditation was miraculous. By contemplation he means aspirations, and by meditation he means as well acts as discursive prayer, which we usually call meditation. I know that even some beginners do in their exercise of meditation or acts now and then come forth with some of those aspirations; but they do not reach a settled exercise of aspirations until they have remained a long time, and perhaps for many years, in the exercise of meditation or acts.

Fifthly, they agree in this: that they tend and intend God for himself, and not for the party's own advantage. In the precedent exercises, which were of meditation or acts, being merely the party's own work, he had a great deal of self-seeking and self-end in the business. For, being his own work, nature some way or other (though secretly or unawares to the party) doth much intend itself and its own advantage. But these aspirations, being more the work of God, have in them much more purity of intention; yea, by them and in them God purely intends himself. But yet, because the party himself is also an agent, or at least an instrument of God in the business, so far have those aspirations some impurity of intention in them, though far less than have the exercises of acts and meditation. And our author himself in divers places showeth that the work

intended by him is a work by which the soul doth intend God for himself and for his own sake.

And I think it is very good and necessary that a soul do learn and know what it is to choose God for himself, for she will come to have good use and practice thereof in some of those aspirations or elevations. And the knowledge thereof may at times do her good and help her, while she lives, for the causing of greater purity of intention in her foresaid exercises of aspirations or elevations. There be in my writings or translations divers places that will teach a soul what the said election of God for himself is, and how it is to be made. And especially it is very good to be used at the time of one's death; for it containeth in it love, contrition, resignation, and all other virtues, and that in a good measure. And there is no difficulty in understanding or practising this which I have said about the election of God for himself. It is but in virtue of one's free will to choose God to be, as he is, one's God, and to make such election for God's own sake and worth, rejecting and laying aside all ends and interests of our own. This matter and the manner of it I have more particularly handled in the second part of my treatise called *The Stay*. But one is never to hinder or trouble the course or concurrence of his foresaid aspirations by making such express acts of choosing God, for such choosing is implied in all those aspirations; yet in some such aspirations and elevations, as will bear and endure such express choosing of God and will seem to require it, there let one do it according to the manner proportional to his exercise. Which is done more subtly, more spiritually, more intensively, more purely, and more elevately, than one doth it in the exercise of meditation or immediate acts.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

Of the case of desolation, and of a certain subtle working

THERE is a case, which is termed desolation or privation, wherein all activity seemeth to be taken from the soul, and she behaveth herself as it were passively towards God, yielding herself as a prey unto him; and yet is able to do nothing actively, God having deprived her of activity, both as to the power of her soul that is called

the understanding, and as to the other power that is called the will. And yet she is not merely in a passive contemplation. For she remaineth still in the use of her senses, and God doth not in any sort discover himself unto her by a *species*, as I have said he doth in contemplation that is merely or principally passive. And such case of desolation or privation of activity is well and largely described in the eighth, ninth, tenth, and eleventh chapters of the *Abridgement of Perfection*. And it is a case of high and excellent love towards God, so long as the soul doth therein abide faithful towards him, without turning itself to seek after solace and delight in creatures, but adheres to God and abides to his will. And although such behaviour of the soul be not a perceptible activity in her, yet is there a secret exercise of love in the case, whether actual or virtual, which God well seeth and understandeth, though the soul herself perhaps doth not. Only she sees she can do no more and no better than she doth, which to her at the most seemeth to be on her part only patience and resignation.

And this case is not forgotten by our author of the *Cloud*. For he expressly speaketh of it in his last chapter, where, having before throughout his book spoken of this working love, he last of all speaketh of the said case of desolation or privation, saying: "The actual feeling of this work is oftentimes withdrawn from one that is a young novice or scholar in this work," etc. And there the author more at large handleth the said case, where he also showeth the reason why God doth withdraw from the soul such ability of working, as ye may see in the said chapter itself. And the said case I take to be inferior to the state of perfect union. But it may be an immediate disposition unto it, as *Secrets Sentiers* affirmeth it to be, terming such case the *Purgatory of Love* in this life.

In the state of perfection I conceive there is an habitual case wherein the soul worketh not perceptibly, yet worketh indeed; but so subtly and secretly that scarce herself can perceive any working. But she seeth plainly and is confident enough that she doth her part towards God for the manner of her exercise. For souls arrived to such a state have not to seek nor to learn how they are interiorly to exercise themselves. They study no more for that than we do how we may see with our eyes or hear with our ears, who have the perfect use of those senses. They have no manner of doubt or difficulty

about the manner of their interior exercise, for they are therein instructed and guided by the spirit of God. What doubts and difficulties they have are about external doings or contrarieties to nature that require of them patience and resignation, in the exercise whereof their life chiefly consisteth, with such internal exercise, passive and active, as God puts them into or requireth of them.

But their active exercise, be it what it will, must needs be, as I have said, very subtle and spiritual. Concerning which the author of *Secrets Sentiers* speaketh much, affirming that the soul is not idle in the said estate, but doth act herself (though very subtly) or else endureth the operations of God within her. But it is very hard, or rather impossible (in my opinion) for him or any other, especially one no elder in years and experience than he is, to conjecture or imagine the qualities of their exercises who have attained and long remained in the state of perfection. For example, who can imagine the internal exercise of Saint Romualdus, who entered into our Order at the age of twenty years, and lived an abstract contemplative life and reached to the age of six score years? Who, I say, can imagine the height and spirituality of his internal exercises in the latter part of his life? We neither can imagine them, nor were they explicable even by himself. For they approach towards those things that Saint Paul in his rapt to the third heaven saw and heard. Whereof he saith it is not lawful or possible for the tongue of man to express, nor for his heart to conceive, otherwise than what he doth at the self-same time that he actually enjoyeth those visions and hearings. The exercise of these men doth pass in the height or top of the spirit—if you will admit any such thing to be in a man's soul—that is, above the powers of it. And how can you, or any other, expect any expressment in words, or yet apprehension by understanding, of what is therein acted, or of the manner of it? And this that I speak of, is of the exercise of the soul being agent in that case; for as for the exercise wherein she is but patient, and God the agent, I doubt not that the difficulty for human expressment or apprehension thereof is as great, if not much greater. For which cause our author of the *Cloud* professeth expressly that he will not —nor indeed doth he—meddle with passive contemplations or workings.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

Of the abstraction proper to this work

Our author speaketh much in his forty-third and forty-fourth chapters of a man's losing all knowing and feeling of his own being, if he would come to the perfection of this work. This losing of the knowing and of the feeling of one's own being is that which I term *abstraction*, and I would say of it as follows:

Such abstraction cannot be got at once, but is acquired by degrees. A man beginneth with meditation or acts, and in time passing thence to aspirations continueth in aspirations until he be called higher, which is into purer elevations. And so at length he cometh to a pure and total abstraction; and then he seemeth to himself to be all spirit and as if he had no body. But a long way and a tedious journey it is to come to this high mount of perfect abstraction; and a man ascends unto it by long and many degrees. The longer he continueth in his exercise of aspirations, the more he getteth, as it were, out of himself, and out of his own being and feeling, and the more abstracted becometh the soul, until in time she comes to be, as it were, totally and perfectly abstracted according to the manner of this life. And the purer and perfecter such abstraction is, the higher is the man ascended to perfection. And this is the condition of saints and perfect souls in this life; so that until they come to such abstraction in some perfect degree they are not perfect nor can exercise perfect love towards God, as who are overswayed and held under with overmuch feeling of their own being, which hinders their contemplation and regard of God. So that, in my opinion, one must be contented to have a feeling of his own being, until God by degrees do draw him to the foresaid abstraction, wherein he shall lose the feeling of his own being and shall have and feel a nothing kind of being, which will be a being and living in God, in whom he hath lost himself and his own being. And this is the case of perfect union. And the said case of abstraction is the case of hatred of one's self and of all creatures, of annihilating them, of transcending them, of not feeling them. And our author saith, that if a man could come to lose the feeling of his own being, all feelings of creatures, which depend upon the man's feeling of him-

self, would consequently be lost, and the soul would abide spiritual, loving and dwelling and working as it were in spirit and in God, and not in body or in its own being.

This case of abstraction is described by Harphius in these words: "By the consurrection or elevation of the superior soul the memory is at length, after a long exercise, made in itself quiet, clear, and calm in her conversion towards divine things and pure from all foreign images; because she is elevated above all sensitive and imaginary things, and above all things that might hinder her in such conversion or application of herself towards God. And she is brought to be firm and stable in unity of spirit; and all the powers both inferior and superior are brought up into the same unity of spirit; and so they are raised and heaved up above all multiplicity, distractions, thoughts, and occupations, as if a man were elevated above the clouds into a true clear tranquillity, where neither wind, nor clouds, nor hail, nor rain can reach, and where there is no manner of change. And so the memory is brought into so admirably clear a tranquillity and quietness that it were not credible or intelligible to a man that had not experienced it; by which clear infused light and tranquillity the man finds himself recollected and established, and that he has pierced through and is anchored in the unity of his spirit; the which unity and quietness he doth now possess even as his proper mansion or dwelling-place, as if he were a man of heaven and not of this life."

Thus far are the words of Harphius, wherein you are ever to understand that the soul never becometh so high or pure in her abstraction or elevation, but that she still remaineth in the body, giving life unto it, and never parteth from it until separated by a real death. You must also know that during this life there is or may be always an increase in height and purity of abstraction, so that it can never come to such height and purity but that it may yet increase and become higher and purer. And so it doth in one that continueth his elevations. I mean that his abstraction increaseth in height and purity while he is in this life and continueth in his said exercises.

A man in time, by the foresaid exercise of aspirations, which is an active exercise, attaineth to this abstraction. But commonly, about the middle of the way, God visiteth the soul with a passive

exercise, and thereby doth wonderfully hasten the soul in her way to perfect abstraction. I would compare it to a journey of a thousand miles, that a weak-bodied man had to make on foot; and as if, when he had with much pain and difficulty gone a hundred of those miles, God by his omnipotent power should thereupon carry him and place him in one instant at the end of nine hundred of those miles; and as if, when he was placed there, God would comfort and strengthen his body for the holding on of his foot journey for the last hundred miles, making the way to be plain and easy, so that he should be well able to reach to the end of his thousand miles. Even so God, by his passive contemplation, which is not usually one-quarter of an hour's work, doth carry a soul further towards perfect abstraction than she with ordinary grace could have reached unto in ten or a dozen years with her own active exercise. And after the said passive contemplation she is very forward towards perfect abstraction.

Yet God may suffer some souls to continue in their active exercise, and thereby in time bringeth them to such perfect abstraction. This, I say, God can and perhaps doth with some souls by means of the active exercise, without bestowing on them any passive contemplation. But then it is likely that he recompenseth them, giving them greater grace and efficacy for their active exercise, and for the use of mortifications, and granteth them longer time for the prosecution of their exercise, whereby he supplieth in them what he doth in some others by the means of the passive contemplation. So that it may well be that they, whom God permitteth to abide only in their own active exercise, will not reach to that perfection until the end of their lives, to which others by the help of a passive contemplation had attained unto in few years and long before their deaths.

The feeling of our not-being extendeth to the soul as well as to the body. The man feeleth himself to have no more being in his soul than in his body, but seemeth to have transcended both body and soul, and to dwell above them both, in the height of the spirit. So that there are two degrees of this abstraction. The first degree is when one has transcended only the body and its senses; and to this degree the first passive contemplation bringeth a man, and so also doth some longer continuance in active contemplation. The second

and higher abstraction is from the soul and its powers into the top or height of it, which may be termed the height of the spirit and is above both soul and body. This is the state of perfection to which a man doth not arrive until a long time after he has had a passive contemplation, or until he has lived for long in active contemplation, and also until he has undergone the great privation or desolation, which disposes him for the state of perfect union. In this degree a man has no feeling of his own being, either as to soul or as to body, but all his feeling seemeth to be only of the being of God.

The said abstraction and feeling of our not-being is the same as the *feeling of our own nothing*, which is the name more commonly given to it by the mystics. For in this abstraction, and in proportion to its degree, the man feels that of himself he has no being and is as it were nothing. And this same feeling is true humility, just as the feeling of our own being is the cause of all pride.

You must note that there is a great difference between the *knowledge* of our nothing and the *feeling* of our nothing. By a little consideration, according to the light of natural reason or of faith, we may know our own nothing, and realize that our being is wholly dependent on the only true being of God. But this knowledge, although it be good and may help us to attain the feeling, is not the feeling. And many men have that knowledge, while very few have that feeling. Yea, the devil himself hath such a knowledge of his own nothing, but he hath not the feeling. And the knowledge of itself is not humility, but it may help us to attain humility. For, by the exercise of this knowledge in meditation, a man attaineth to the exercise of acts, and from them to aspirations, and by them to the foresaid abstraction, which only is the cause of true humility. And when you find spiritual writers exhorting their scholars to think of their own nothing, they mean that knowledge of their nothing and meditation upon it, which is a good exercise for beginners; and they do not mean the feeling, which is attained only by the perfect.

Here perhaps you will ask me whether a soul that has attained to perfect abstraction feels his own not-being at all times and as it were habitually, or only when he is actually in his abstraction. To this I answer, that I do not think he has this actual feeling of his own not-

being except when he is actually in his exercise towards God, whether that be elevation, union, or other exercise. For at other times he is not in the state of abstraction, but is more in himself and hath a feeling of himself and of his own being.

Secrets Sentiers (in the latter end of his thirteenth chapter)—God knows what warrant he hath for it—saith that God often, if not ordinarily, permitteth souls that have reached perfect union to descend from that state, and bringeth them down from their high abstraction to the state they were in when first they began to be spiritual scholars. And then they seek to ascend again, and do so little by little until they have reached the height of the spirit; yea, and higher than they were before. And afterwards they are brought down again and again ascend, and still higher. Thus do they proceed all their lives, ascending and descending, and ever increasing in purity and height of abstraction.

Father Benet Fitch calleth this abstraction by the name of *annihilation*. But the term of *annihilation* doth not please me so well, and is not so free from error, as are the terms of *abstraction*, *transcending*, *surmounting*, and *forgetting* of one's self and all creatures. And our author of the *Cloud* terms it a *keeping under the cloud of forgetting*.

That what I have said about the imperfection of the first degree of abstraction is true may be gathered from the state of desolation or privation that followeth after a passive contemplation. For in this state a man findeth himself full of risings and repugnances in his nature and sensuality, as is described by the author of *Secrets Sentiers* when speaking of this privation. And yet the man had been brought by his passive contemplation to a degree of abstraction in which he felt his own not-being.

And surely until a man attains the foresaid abstraction, either of the first or second degree, there is not any true humility or true mortification in him. His seeming virtues are but natural and very imperfect: more exterior than interior, more human than divine, more natural than supernatural, and consequently far distant from Christian perfection.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

The conclusion of this introduction

It is now high time I should return to my first purpose, which was of making some notes upon the book called the *Cloud*, from which purpose of mine some will perhaps think that I am somewhat strayed. But indeed I do not think myself to be much out of my way, or beside my matter, when I express anything, whatsoever it be, that I think may be for your spiritual use, albeit it do not immediately concern the title and matter of my intended book. Neither is anything that I have said strange to the matter of the book of the *Cloud*, being about the work of love in and by a soul towards God. For all that I have said doth concern the same matter, and doth give some light for the better understanding of the said book of the *Cloud*, and for the practice of the work therein so much commended, according to the enablement that the soul shall have for it from God.

The course that I shall take about the book called the *Cloud* shall be this: that when I find nothing in a chapter of it for me to note, I will pass over the same chapter, or chapters, intending that you shall content yourselves with it as it is in the book, without seeking further light from me other than what the precedent treatise hath delivered unto you, or that you have read in any treatises of mine. But when I find anything in a chapter for me to note, I shall particularly mention such chapter or chapters to you, that you may compare my notes with the book if you see cause for it.

I must take heed that I, becoming a commentator upon an obscure work, become not more obscure in my exposition than the text itself which I would expound. It is said of the commentators on St Denis—and our *Cloud* is one comment upon it—that they are as obscure as is the writing itself. And if one cannot write more clearly than the text itself, he may better forbear to write at all upon it. And therefore I shall pass over without any expressment what I cannot express better to the understandings of others—howsoever I think myself to understand the same—lest I should seem to expound that which is obscure by that which is more obscure.

Part II: The Commentary

THE FIRST CHAPTER

THERE are four degrees or forms of a Christian life. The first is *common*, and that is the estate of the common sort of the Christians of the world. The second is *special*, and that is the form or degree of them who, forsaking the state of the world, do betake themselves to a religious estate, and being come into religion are not called by God to an internal life, but are held to an external life, remaining ignorant of an internal life and the exercises of it. These are to remain in such active and external lives till God do call or enable them to an internal life, towards which they are to dispose themselves by mortifying of passions, exercising of virtues, and use of prayer vocal and mental, the best they can and as God shall enable them. And they are to draw towards an internal life, or dispose themselves for it, according to the grace that God shall give them, adding thereunto their own discreet industries. In the meantime they are to content themselves with the degree in which they are, and therein to serve God the best they can, till his grace and favour do call them higher; that is, more into their interior and into the knowledge and greater purification thereof: come such grace sooner or later, ever or never. For do men what they can, yet will God perhaps suffer them, or some of them, for a long time, or perhaps for all the days of their lives, to abide in such active external life. Wherein behaving themselves as they should, they are not only friends to God, but are also, in comparison of the common sort of the good Christians of the world, his special friends: in regard they are in a state wherein they exercise their active external lives with less sin and more perfection—if they look well to themselves and be industrious—than they could have done in the more distracting and perilous estate of the world. For they have in religion divers helps which they had not in the world, and fewer impediments; besides the merits of their three vows, that do ennoble all their doings and sufferings above the doings and sufferings of the common Christians of the world.

The third degree of Christian life is that which is called *singular*. And that is when God calleth a soul to an internal life, and to the exercise of it, and the soul correspondeth to such call with her industries, using as much abstraction of life and internal life as such call and her profession and state of life do require of her and will permit unto her. Such estate is called *singular* because commonly they be fewer in number, than be they whom God doth not vouchsafe to call to such internal life. This latter is also called *contemplative*, and is the part of Mary, and is more near and acceptable to God than is the part of Martha, whose person was not so near to our Saviour, nor her exercise—though commendable and profitable—so commended by him as was the internal life and exercise of Mary. To them, whom God calleth to this singular degree, besides the aptness which they have thereunto by their natures, he doth also impart an internal light proper to such degree, by which he doth direct their external doings, as also doth more enable them for internal prayer than he doth those whom I said he leaves, as it were, without doors, in an honest, external, active life. The exercise of those of the third degree draws more and more to be spiritual. If they begin with meditation, in time they pass thence to immediate acts, and thence in time they are called to aspirations; the which after long exercise bring unto the fourth degree, the which is called of *perfect* lovers.

This fourth degree is not soon attained to, but in time it is, by the grace and conduct of God, after much labour and undergoing of the exercises that are precedent to it, both of prayer and also of mortification, in the course of one's life. This *perfect* love (saith our author) endeth not with this life, as do the exercises of the preceding degrees. For the exercise of aspirations (which is the highest exercise that is in the three preceding degrees) ends when one is actually in the exercise of perfect union in this life. For aspirations are a longing and tendance to such a union; the which union being had, the aspirations are satisfied and do cease during the time that such union lasteth. But such perfect union of love doth not end with this life, but is continued in the future life, where the union is almost infinitely more perfect, more intense, and more fast and strait than it was in this life. It was the same will and the self-same God that were united here and are united in the other world; and

therefore it is said that the union begun here is continued there. And the union—that was and is in love and affection only, and not in the substance of the soul or of the divinity—is the same union here and there. But the difference is, that the understanding sees God in the other world as he is in his essence, and loves him with answerable love, which must be far greater by many degrees. Whereas the understanding in this life hath not such essence of God for her object, but some *species* or other, in some sort representing him; or else sees him only according to and by the light of faith; wherefore the love is answerable and by many degrees less than is the love in the future life. The said continuation of union and love is signified by those words of our Saviour, speaking of the first part of Mary, that it should *never be taken from her*, but should be continued for perpetuity.

The third degree, being *singular*, our author termeth also a *solitary form of living*, because all internal livers do live a more solitary life—whether ye regard their external or their internal behaviour—than do those of the second degree, being more active and external livers. For those internal livers use different exercises, not only from the active livers, but also from one another. I mean their internal exercises and doings. And in their external behaviour they live more abstractedly. For this reason they are termed *singular* and *solitary*, although they live in communities; yea, and in company of never so many of their own degree—that is, of internal livers. For every one of them lives as if there were none other but herself—I mean, as regards her interior. Whereas there is not such difference between one active liver and another, all their exercises being wholly about external doings, the which they do in much the same manner, as regards God. And for these reasons their lives are not said to be singular or solitary. *Secretum meum mihi: My secret to myself*, saith every such solitary and singular liver.

THE SECOND CHAPTER

In this chapter I only note these words—viz.: *All thy life must now stand in desire and longing, if thou mind to advance in degree of perfection. And this desire and longing must evermore be wrought in thy will by the*

hand of Almighty God and thy consent. Those are the words of the book: where the words *desire* and *longing* do signify aspiring and tendance towards God, the which is done by aspirations. The which, saith our author, are *wrought by God*; which is, that God moveth and informeth the soul for the producing and exercising of those aspirations, and for the said tendance. And where, trow you, doth God work the said desire and longing? Marry, saith our author, in the *will*; which is the superior will of the party, and not principally (if at all) the inferior will—that is, of sensuality. For although this word *longing* doth sound like a love of the heart and of sensuality, yet in this place it is not used in that sense by our author; but he means aspirations that are exercised in the superior will, which is moved and informed in it by God.

For you must know that the aspirations by which a soul tendeth to contemplation do proceed out of the said superior soul, and not from the bodily heart or sensuality. For if they came from here, then would it be the devotion that is called sensible. My meaning is that the exercise of aspirations originally passeth in the superior will; and if it descend into the sensuality, then it is also sensible devotion. But it is securer and of more profit than is the devotion that takes its origin in sensuality. And proper aspirations—which our author termeth *desire* and *longing*—do proceed from the superior will, that is therein moved by God, and thence take their beginning, and not in the heart in sensuality. And this, whether such stirrings of the will do thence descend into the sensuality or do not.

THE THIRD CHAPTER

HERE our author showeth the great excellency, worth, and profit of this exercise of aspirations, being the loving of God. And what better or nobler work can a creature do than to love God, each creature doing it according to his manner and ability? Our author shows how acceptable is our service therein to the angels and saints, how odious to the devil, and how profitable to others, living and dead. And therefore let none blame those that are in the said exercise because they do not therein expressly pray unto angels or saints, or otherwise honour them; or because they do not expressly pray

for others, dead or alive. For you see, by our author, that in and by such exercises those offices towards others are performed in the best manner. For loving God, they love all creatures and honour them according to their worths. And in God (that is, in exercise of love towards God) nothing, said Tauler,[1] is neglected; but all things are in it performed and satisfied—yet not so that we are to omit our obligations.

Where the author in this chapter speaketh of a *sensible* feeling of God, by the word *sensible* he meaneth perceptible. For the exercise passeth not in sense or sensuality, but in the superior soul, which is distinct from sense. Indeed, that place seemeth to me to be rather intended of *acts*, whereof he saith that they are performed with facility, when God concurs and gives grace and facility. Else are they performed with some difficulty and pain to nature.

The *cloud of unknowing* is, as it were, the mean between the image of creatures and God. By the image of creatures is meant the natural and ordinary way of tending towards God; the which use of images is chiefly had in meditation. And when one gives over meditation, or doth not at all use it, but useth acts or aspirations, by the which he would immediately tend towards God, then is he in a *cloud of unknowing*. For he hath lost creatures, and yet is not reached to God, but apprehends him only according to faith. So that this *cloud of unknowing* (which is the immediate place or means of knowing and seeing God in this life by any active exercise of ours) is but the self-same knowledge and sight of God which I and other writers do usually term the *light*, *sight*, and *knowledge that we have by our faith*. And as this author saith that the best and highest sight we can come to have of God is in this *cloud of unknowing*, I say the same of faith: that the highest sight we can have of God in this life is but according to the general and confused knowledge of faith. For you must know that our author speaks only of an active exercise of love, which is active contemplation, and not of passive contemplations, wherein are presented to the soul certain *species* of God.

And the longer one beateth upon this *cloud of unknowing*, or abideth in it, the nearer he draws to the light which is God. Yet he shall not attain to that same light in this life. And so the longer one walketh forward in and by the light of faith, although he remains

[1] John Tauler (1300–61), German Dominican, preacher and mystic.

still in faith, yet doth he draw nearer to God, whom yet he shall not attain to in this life. And therefore, for all his progress, he must still abide only in the light of faith, which is the *cloud of unknowing*. Because he sees not, nor shall see, in this life what God indeed is in himself. Yet he is nearer now to him, and hath a better sight of him than he had while he sought him by the images of creatures, as he did in the exercise of meditation. And the said *cloud of unknowing* and obscure light of faith our author also termeth *darkness*, because God is not seen in it, nor indeed any creatures. And so nothing is seen in it, and therefore it is termed *darkness*. Only, as I have said, God is seen in it according to the general notion of him which we have by our faith. And whereas our author saith that *if ever thou wilt see him or feel him, it must be in this cloud and darkness*, he meaneth that both passive and active contemplation are in or by the said *cloud*. He meaneth that those whom God calleth in the ordinary manner to a passive contemplation, are called to it whilst they are labouring in the said *cloud* or *darkness*. And those whom he doth not yet call to any such passive contemplation, but permitteth to continue in their own activity of aspirations, remain in such *cloud* or *darkness*, seeing him accordingly—that is, in the obscure or general notion which we have by our faith.

THE FOURTH CHAPTER

This chapter treateth of the time that is to be spent in the work of love which is the subject of this book. The exercise of this work consisteth in elevating our will towards God and in repeating such elevations. Adam, before his fall, lost no time wherein he did not apply his will towards God: either by divers elevations thick and immediately one after another, or by a continued application of his will for some space together, or by one continued act during all his life or during all the time he was awake. If his exercise was not continued thus, it is certain then that it was by repeated elevations, so fast one upon another that there was not, nor could be, any time between each union and each new elevation. So that he was in effect continually united with God, and never distracted. And, had he not sinned, neither he nor any of his progeny would ever have

failed in such working, but would have continually exercised it. For this were men created—that is, for the actual and continual loving of God. And, were it not for Adam's sin, the body would in no sort have hindered this work, but would have taken its own part therein. And although the grace of God enables such of the race of Adam as are in his grace to raise their wills towards him repeatedly or continually for some time, yet they are not able to continue the work as Adam did before his fall, and as his progeny might have done had he not fallen. And this is because of the weight and frailty of the body, which draws and hinders the soul from such perpetual union and causeth her sometimes to be distracted, and consequently to fall into some sins or imperfections. I except our blessed Lord, and our blessed Lady, his most holy Mother, who never failed in union with God, nor lost the least instant of time, nor were ever in any sort distracted.

But others are not in such case; though God giveth to some more grace and ability and less hindrance from their bodies than he doth to others. Everyone is to observe the grace and ability bestowed on him by God and to act accordingly, and neither more nor less. He is not to do more, lest he harm and destroy the body, and so utterly disable himself from doing as much as he might otherwise have done. He is not to do less, because he would then neglect the grace given him or offered him by God, and thereby incur blame or sin.

Our author showeth that a man hath naturally a power in his soul which is called his will, by which he may will this thing or that thing at his pleasure, and by the grace of God may apply the same will in love towards God. The same ability of willing may be as sudden, speedy, and frequent as is the twinkle of a man's eye. And this was the natural condition of the first man, by which with the grace of God he did with his will as it were twinkle and twinkle continually, elevating the same will towards God by iterations of such twinklings. And him are we to imitate in it, so far as the frailties of our bodies will permit, and the grace of God enable us. And we are to observe such ability and grace, and if we do so we practise discretion. And discretion we must have both in this work and in all other works which we wish to be acceptable to God or profitable to ourselves.

Observe the words of our author: *For want of this work a man*

falleth evermore deeper and deeper into sin, and further and further from God; as, contrariwise, *by heeding and continual working in this work only, without any other work, a man riseth evermore higher and higher from sin, and nearer and nearer to God*. Those are our author's words, by which you see that for want of exercise towards God one goes further and further from him, and that the exercise of love by itself, if a man did nothing else, would bring him more and more to God and preserve him from sin. And not only the exercise of aspirations, but also the exercises of meditation and immediate acts are of the nature of this work of love, although one of them draws nearer to God than another. Aspirations draw nearer than do immediate acts, and immediate acts nearer than meditation. But, in all this, each and every man is to consider the grace and enablement he has for it from God or by nature, and also times and circumstances, and to act accordingly and never otherwise.

Those who have reached a good degree of aspirations will better understand our author's meaning in this chapter, where he says that the work intended by him is nothing else but a *sudden stirring, and as it were an unadvised, speedily springing up unto God, even as a spark flieth from the coal*. And what a number of these stirrings might be wrought in the space of one hour, in a soul well disposed for it! And this *stirring* is the self-same thing which I call *motion* or *information* from God. And he saith that it is *sudden* and *unadvised*, because it proceedeth not from any discourse, premeditation, or consideration, but merely from interior motion, impulse, and information from God, moving and directing the will in it. And such is the nature of perfect aspirations and elevations.

THE FIFTH CHAPTER

The *cloud of forgetting* of creatures, which our author here mentioneth, is but the *active annihilation of creatures*, of which Father Benet Fitch speaketh so much in his third book of *The Will of God*. And I generally term it a *transcending of creatures*. So these three (*forgetting*, *active annihilation*, and *transcending of creatures*) are one and the same thing in different terms. And so also are the terms of *aspirations* and *elevations of the will*. For by such aspirations and

elevations a man doth as much as he can to forget all creatures, annihilate them, and transcend them; and both immediately pass unto and into the Creator—that is, God—who is the final and blissful rest of the soul.

THE SIXTH CHAPTER

I HAVE no special matter to note in this chapter, but refer you to it as it lieth in the book.

THE SEVENTH CHAPTER

NOTE how the author termeth the meditation of the passion—much more would he say it of all other meditations—inferior to the exercise of love immediately towards God. This, which is the work of this book, is not to be given over for any meditation of the passion or any other meditation. He means, when the soul can exercise this love without needing to meditate on any matter in order to raise it.

Here our author showeth that one is never to expect to be able to come to the exercise of love treated of in this book until he have first exercised himself in exercises of the imagination, as are meditation and immediate acts; and until he is called thence by God, which will rarely or never be till after a long time first spent in the exercises of the imagination. These have, and must have, corporal images in them; but aspirations and elevations of the will are without all corporal images, and are above the imagination. For they are acted in and by the will of the superior soul, which in that same business of aspiration doth not need or seek after the help of the imagination. The imagination is a corporal instrument seated in the head, and in it are reserved the images of all corporal things that have come in by any of the five outward senses; and by regarding those images, as it were in a looking-glass, doth the understanding understand and know corporal and sensible things. And without this help of the imagination the understanding could not understand or know them, nor anything else naturally. And he that without precedent exercises of the imagination, or before he is called out

of them by God, would of his own head put himself into the work of love treated of in this book, would (saith my author) foully err, and in the end would find himself deceived of his purpose.

As for making use of a word of one syllable, as LOVE or SIN, whereof our author speaketh, I wish you to suspend your judgement, at least as to practice, until you hear our author's further explanation of himself in a later chapter of his book.

THE EIGHTH CHAPTER

THE whole content of the chapter is this: that one who is in this exercise of love, which consisteth in applying the will to God, should not then admit any matter of knowledge or consideration which might present itself to the understanding.

Note his words: that *love may reach to God in this life, but knowledge never*. In this life we may and do know that God is none of all those things that we can apprehend with our imaginations or understandings, but that he is infinitely above the reach of them. But what God is in himself and in his own essence we cannot know in this life. In the future life we shall see and know him as he is in himself, but not fully, for no creature can possibly do that. He can but see and know him according to the measure of light and sight that God shall bestow on his soul.

THE NINTH CHAPTER

I REFER you to the chapter itself.

THE TENTH CHAPTER

AMONG other things in this chapter he showeth the great difference as to peril or security of soul between those who have a good and firm intention of tending towards God and wholly serving him, and others who have no such intention. He showeth that many things in the latter are mortal sins which in the former are at the most venial. The cause (saith he) that so freeth thee in such cases from mortal sins is *the grounding and rooting of thine intention in God*. This intention

was made at thy first entry on that state of life in which thou livest—that is to say, when thou didst first convert thy heart and will to God, and didst resolve to labour for the gaining of his perfect love. And this intention thou dost still hold to and prosecute. It is of such intention that he speaks.

THE ELEVENTH CHAPTER

By *recklessness* he means carelessness or neglect; and by *recklessness in venial sins* he intends a not-caring about the committing of venial sins.

THE TWELFTH CHAPTER

This chapter showeth that no exercises whatever, whether external or internal, can cause perfect virtues in a soul without the exercise of love; but that this exercise alone by itself will cause such perfection of virtues in her. And it destroyeth the very root and ground of sin, which other exercises do not. And it doth gain not only one particular virtue, but even all manner of virtues. Whereas other exercises do but gain this or that special virtue, and that not in any perfection. And this exercise hath purity of intention, being directed towards God for his own sake; whereas the others have in them some self-intending or other, which makes our actions impure and imperfect. You see by this how absolutely necessary is this exercise of love before one can attain to perfection.

THE THIRTEENTH CHAPTER

This chapter treateth of the virtue of *meekness*, which is humility, and showeth how this virtue is got by two means. The first means is by the consideration of our own vileness, baseness, frailty, and nothingness. The second means is this exercise of love, by which we, being in God, do see and feel our own nothingness. Humility is truly and perfectly exercised in this latter manner, but not in the former. Yet the former may be a means to bring us to the latter, and then we cease our considerations, at least for the time. And by this

you see that there is no true humility gotten without the exercise of love.

Our author showeth that while the soul is in this exercise, and by being in God feeleth her own nothingness, she is then truly humble. And whether this exercise and this feeling do happen to a man often or but seldom, it lasteth (saith he) but for a very little while. For soon he cometh to have a feeling of himself and of his own being—through the weight of his body and the frailty of nature—and then he is not so perfectly humble. Yet I think that some souls—or at least our blessed Lady—have come to such perfection that they had an habitual and lasting feeling of their own nothingness. But I doubt it of others besides our blessed Lady, and rather think they only felt their own nothingness perfectly while they were actually in this exercise—that is, in actual union with God. So that since that union is in this life subject to many interruptions, by reason of our frailty, therefore we may not have this feeling of our nothingness continually. I wish all souls would understand this doctrine, for then they would understand what true humility is; and that is a thing known only to few.

THE FOURTEENTH AND FIFTEENTH CHAPTERS

THESE chapters pursue and develop the same subject of *perfect meekness*—that is, perfect humility. In this exercise of love the soul putteth herself into God and regardeth only him, annihilating herself and all other creatures. This is the *active annihilation* treated of by Father Benet Fitch. And it is also humiliation. The soul being so annihilated and humbled doth look upon God, wishing well to him according to her capacity, losing and forgetting herself and all creatures. And indeed this is that *abstraction of the soul* from the senses of the body in her active work of which I have spoken to you before. And the same thing is called *self-hatred* by the author of the book, *The Method to Serve God;* without which self-hatred, saith he, it is impossible to have perfect love of God.

THE SIXTEENTH AND SEVENTEENTH CHAPTERS

HERE he shows that Saint Mary Magdalen, after her conversion, attained to this exercise of the perfect love of God, and that she was in it when she sat at our Saviour's feet, while her sister Martha was solicitous about the corporal entertainment of our Saviour.

Observe that Saint Mary Magdalen, while she sat at our Saviour's feet, was so serious in her interior exercise of love towards his mere and pure divinity, that not only did she not trouble herself with her sister's business of providing his dinner, or with her complaint about herself, but also she did not regard or think upon the beauty of his precious body there present, or give ear to the sweet voice and words which then and there proceeded from his Manhood, but did wholly attend to her interior work of love, which was the union of her will with the pure divinity.

THE EIGHTEENTH CHAPTER

WHERE he saith that *actives do object against contemplatives that what they do is nought*, by *nought* is meant nothing—that is to say, a thing of no worth or profit, and not an evil thing.

THE NINETEENTH CHAPTER

ALL is plain enough in it.

THE TWENTIETH CHAPTER

THE work of love commended throughout this book is that same one thing which our Saviour said was the *one thing necessary*. And what is that? Forsooth, saith our author, *that God, for and by himself, be loved and praised above all things.*

We see that in this work God is loved and praised, not only *for* himself, but also *by* himself, as saith our author. For it is he that moveth and directeth the act of love; and in all that he doth, God

doth intend his own honour. Therefore such aspirations and elevations cannot but have purity of intention in them.

I must here repeat what I have said elsewhere—namely, that the exercise of love mentioned throughout this book (which I usually term the *exercise of aspirations*) has great variety in it, comprehending humiliations, exinanitions, annihilations, praisings, thanksgivings, elevations, adorations, as also the state of privation or desolation, union, and other various conditions. And all of them are aspirings and tendances towards God, and come by motions from God, and are active and not passive exercises. And they are all immediately directed towards God himself, and not towards any angels or saints or other creatures whatsoever.

THE TWENTY-FIRST CHAPTER

I NOTE nothing special here, but refer you to the chapter itself. Yet I may ask you to observe that he leaves no room for the exercise of the passion so long as one is enabled to this exercise of love. This love is directed to the pure divinity, without the use of any image, either of our Saviour's humanity, or of any other creature. So that, according to our author's teaching throughout this book, if one be enabled for the said exercise of the love of the divinity, and that during his whole life, he must not leave it to go and exercise himself in the passion, much less in any inferior matter. And in this point our author agreeth fully, both with the author of *Secrets Sentiers* and with what I myself have affirmed in my treatise on the exercise of the passion (in the book H); wherein we differ from the opinion of Father Benet Fitch in the third book of his *Will of God*, and from some others also, who would have some exercise of the passion in all states. But regard our present author well, and you shall find him to be of another mind, as was I long before I met with the *Cloud*. And *Secrets Sentiers* expressly concurreth with me.

THE TWENTY-SECOND CHAPTER

I REFER you to the chapter itself.

THE TWENTY-THIRD CHAPTER

NOTE how he saith that *our Lord will answer and satisfy in their interior* those who find fault with the spiritual courses of contemplatives, *if it stand well with these fault-finders*—that is to say, if they be such as have care of their consciences and would not willingly do anything that might displease God. And consequently our author would say that it stands ill in conscience with those who persist in decrying the spiritual courses of contemplatives and persecute those contemplative souls for their abstract and praying lives.

Note also how effectually our author inculcateth the divine providence in regard to the bodily needs—and much more for the spiritual needs—of those whom he calleth from solicitude about temporalities to solitary and abstract lives. And from our author's words I may infer that if God should (by interior invitation or any other of the ways specified in my treatise of *Doubts and Calls*) call me into a wilderness where there was no sustenance to be had, or should call me, in the very middle of a city, to an abstract life, without showing me how I might be provided with corporal necessaries, yet I might and ought to obey the said call, leaving the rest wholly to God and his providence. And he would continually send me provision some way or other, or would tell me how I might procure what was needful to me. But I must take care that my call be from God, lest there should be delusion in it. My treatise mentioned above hath instructions in it for the discerning and judging of this and of all other calls.

And *God*, saith our author, having brought thee to such a case, *will either send thee abundance, or*, if he send thee scarcity, *will make amends by giving thee patience in mind* to be contented therewith *and strength in body* to hold out and live with such scarcity. And thus the body shall be as able for the service of the spirit as if it had never so great plenty of temporal commodities. And God will also give thee the grace to be contented with the scarcity. And what more would a soul, that seeks after God, crave or expect from him?

This is a notable instruction; I would that all religious men would well understand it and more practise it, by confiding more in God than in their own solicitudes.

THE TWENTY-FOURTH AND TWENTY-FIFTH CHAPTERS

It is good doctrine and all plain enough in itself.

THE TWENTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

This chapter also is plain enough. Here our author professeth in plain words that throughout the course of his book he speaks only of the exercise of love which a man exerciseth by help and motion from God (the which is an active exercise and contemplation), and not of the work of love which God only worketh in the soul. This latter I am wont to call a *passive contemplation*, and it is the very same thing that Father Benet Fitch calls a *passive annihilation of creatures.*

Note how he saith that the passive contemplation, when it pleaseth God to visit the soul with it, doth *pierce* the *cloud of unknowing* which was between her and God. That is to say, whereas the soul before saw God only in a general and darksome manner, by and according to the light of faith, now by the passive contemplation she sees him in a particular manner, which is by some *species* or other, representing him in a special and particular manner, but not as he truly is in himself, for no *species* is able to do that.

THE TWENTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

Here you find that no one is fit for this work unless he live in some solitariness and abstraction of life, either in religion or out of religion. For our author expressly excludeth all those who remain in active states of life, or who, being in the religious state, do lead active lives. Much more would he exclude those who are neither active nor contemplative, as be those who are not serious or industrious either in active or in contemplative exercises.

He calls those *active* who do not seriously pursue mental prayer, but do chiefly or only content themselves with corporal labours and exercises and with vocal prayers, not obtaining by them any deep reach or insight into their interior. And these actives are of two sorts. The first sort is of them that have good wills, but yet have a

natural indisposition to an internal life, and so have no divine call to it. For God commonly accommodateth his calls or graces to the natural temperament. And of this sort there be divers to be found, as well in the state of religion as out of it, and even in contemplative Orders as is our Order. Such are not for the work of love mentioned in the *Cloud*. I mean not for the principal part of it, which is the exercise of proper aspirations, to which active souls of this first sort do never attain. They are to content themselves with what they can do, using such and so much mental prayer as they are able, whether it be meditation or immediate acts, with the greater use of vocal prayers and corporal labours or exercises.

The other sort of actives is of those that have a natural disposition in them for an internal life, but lack either a divine call to it or external commodity for it. And such as this is the condition of many in the world, who have the said natural disposition and interior aptness, but cannot get commodity of place for it, or are in the state of marriage and worldly solicitude, or lack means or bodily ability, so that they are refused if they offer themselves to contemplative religious houses. And some others there be who have this disposition and have been received into a contemplative religious house, but are hindered by some crossness in nature (as evil inclinations) which counterpoises or overweighs their natural disposition and the divine call. Or else they lack the instructions proper for a contemplative life. Or, if they have all these things—disposition, divine call, religious state, and good instructions—yet are they overcharged with much singing and vocal prayers, or with corporal labours, further than the strength of their body and spirit can bear, or are denied or abridged in their times for recollection. These, therefore, since they do not or cannot reach to the work of aspirations treated of in the *Cloud*, should lead the best active lives they can, drawing as much as lieth in them to the contemplative, which is the better, and carefully eschewing the idle and naughty life of them that are neither active nor contemplative. For these will neither work nor pray, as having a will to neither; but seek only to satisfy the desires of their nature, at least so far as they can do it without committing mortal sin. Which humour and condition of theirs, if it can be without mortal sin, yet is most dangerous, as it is at the very brink of falling into mortal sin.

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

NOTE that he saith that a man, while he is in this life, shall always have the *cloud of unknowing* between him and God. For though one come to never so high and so great an abstraction from the senses, yet doth he not see God. Only may he surmount all creatures and see that none of them is God. For the sight of God is reserved for the future life. And therefore the highest sight that one hath of God by any active exercise is but according to faith, the which doth not, nor can, distinctly show unto us what he is, but tells us of him only in a generality, as that he is infinite, with other attributes of his. And therefore they are deceived who think that souls, which have attained a pure abstraction in spirit, do in their active exercise see God otherwise than according to faith, or that they contemplate angels or saints or other divine or celestial things. And this I say of active exercises. For as for passive exercises, which are only and wholly in God's hands to impart or deny, and which he doth but rarely impart, God may in them show what he pleaseth; but he doth never show himself as he is in his essence.

Note also how he saith that, in punishment of original sin, there is no one who has reached such perfection of life that thoughts about creatures or their deeds do not now and then arise in his mind, which would distract him, if they could, by causing a mean or impediment between him and God.

THE TWENTY-NINTH AND THIRTIETH CHAPTERS

I NOTE nothing special in them.

THE THIRTY-FIRST CHAPTER

THE doctrine of transcending sins and all creatures is here notably delivered and commended. And those sins and creatures so to be transcended, are but distractions that would seek to make a mean or impediment between us and God in our exercise of love towards

him. And in such a case there is not a more hurtful distraction than thoughts about sins. But our author in this and the following chapters treats of the remedies against these and all other distractive thoughts that would press upon us and hinder our elevation towards God. Our remedy generally will be perseverance in our exercises. We must endeavour not to be daunted or dejected at these distractive thoughts, but transcend and neglect them, regarding not them but God. As our author saith in the next chapter, we must *look over their shoulders*, as if we looked for some other thing, and that thing is God. The devices which he saith God will teach will be but perseverance in our exercise and observance of what most helps us against such distractions. And he saith that no man can teach one his behaviour about them, but God only can and will teach a man by means of the man's own experience.

THE THIRTY-SECOND CHAPTER

HERE he prosecuteth the same subject and showeth that the remedy against these thoughts is to neglect them and aspire towards God. This aspiring he terms a very vehement and languishing desire towards God. But you must not think that he means love of the heart or sensuality, or sensual desire, or any troublesome, unquiet love. He means a resolute and quiet determination of the superior will that will not give over seeking God for any difficulty whatsoever, and especially for any troublesome importunity of distractive thoughts.

THE THIRTY-THIRD CHAPTER

HE showeth here that our motions to sins and our distractive thoughts arise from two grounds. The first is our own former custom of sinning; the other is original sin wherein we were born. And this latter will give us some matter of temptation so long as we live; but, saith he, our difficulties and perils in it will not be so great as from our own sins heretofore actually committed, and from the custom and ill habits of sinning gathered thereby.

THE THIRTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

He showeth here that only God can move the will to this exercise of love, and that God doth it immediately—that is, without help of the imagination or understanding. No angel, whether good or bad, nor any creature can do it. They can only work in a man's will by causing or using some image in the imagination, the which appearing to the understanding they seek to move the will thereby. But the will, being moved by God, would immediately apply itself to God and suffer no thought to be between her and God, or to hinder her union with him. Here also our author showeth that a soul is to follow the motion, tract, and guidance of God, who is the mover, master, and director in this work of love.

THE THIRTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

By *meditation* here is not meant discursive prayer, which is the common meaning of the word now, but consideration, whereby a man thinks how he ought to behave interiorly and exteriorly without sin. Or else it means the exercise of immediate acts. For such exercise of acts hath some meditation in it, and meditation in its proper signification is but a thinking. And such exercise of acts is a means to bring one in time to the exercise of love treated of by our author. By *prayer* our author means as well vocal prayer as mental prayer (meditation or acts), by which a soul is brought to the exercise of love (aspirations and elevations).

THE THIRTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

This and some of the next ensuing chapters deal with the exercise of aspirations, the which do proceed suddenly and without any premeditation or cause, but only from interior motion and information from God who moves the will.

THE THIRTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

You see by our author that sometimes God may move the soul to utter vocal prayers, which nevertheless are aspirative. And sometimes he moveth the soul to utter her single aspiration vocally.

Note how he saith that the dwelling of such an exerciser should be above in spirit—the which I term *abstraction from sense*—whence do proceed the said aspirations. For they proceed not from sense or sensuality. Note also the efficacy of such a short aspiration or elevation, because it proceedeth from the height of the spirit.

You see also how he saith that *the height, depth, breadth, and length of the spirit are all one.* And therefore some spiritual writers do call that the *top*, or *height*, or *supreme part* of the spirit, which others do term the *fund*, or *depth*, or *bottom*, or *centre*. But they are all of one effect. Yet if a man would regard the truth, there is neither height, nor depth, nor breadth, nor length in a spirit. For such qualities belong only to corporal things, though they be used in the expressing of spiritual things for the better understanding of them.

THE THIRTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

Here he speaketh still of the efficacy of those aspirations with God. Note how he saith that *that which a man hath by nature is nearer to him than that which he hath by gift, grace, or exercise.*

THE THIRTY-NINTH CHAPTER

Although our author hath proposed unto us for an example certain words of one syllable—as God, Love, Sin—to be exercised mentally or vocally, yet do I most commend unto you that advice of his in this chapter by which he leaveth you in this point to yourselves, and to the motion of God, without tying you to any manner of word or words, one or more or none at all, long or short, mental or vocal, this or that, and gives you absolute scope and freedom therein, according to what you find is most suitable to the desire or motion of your spirit.

By *oftness* of prayer he means frequency or iteration of aspirations, the which are very short and speedy, but may be produced oftentimes—that is to say, thick one after another.

THE FORTIETH CHAPTER

HERE he speaketh further about a word of one syllable; but I prefer you to remember the freedom he gave you in the preceding chapter, of using no word at all if you be not moved to it. You may observe that our author here saith that sometimes the aspiration is exercised *only in the spirit*, and that sometimes *it bursteth forth into words*. And this I think was the case with Brother Masseo of the Order of Saint Francis. We read of him that often for a good space he did nothing but utter the sound U, U, U, which was an aspiration of one syllable.[1] And if anyone had seen him or heard him then, not knowing the cause of it, he would have judged him to be out of his wits. We read also of others who, without uttering of any words at all, have had certain corporal motions, such as a trembling in the body, or a clapping of the hands, or other gestures. These proceeded from an impulse of the spirit. God moving the spirit and the spirit moving the body. And all these corporal motions and gestures, whether they have words joined with them or not, are aspirations. Of this kind also was the exercise of Brother Bernard, who was the first disciple of Saint Francis. For sometimes, when he was out of the sight of men, he would through an impulse of the spirit run over mountains and open places, as if he had been a fury or a madman.[2]

But beginners, who have not by long exercise in meditation or acts reached an habitual exercise of aspirations, must beware how they yield to such corporal motions. For in them such motions do not proceed from the spirit, but mostly from their nature and body, and therefore they have far less spiritual profit in them and much peril of indiscretion, to the hurt of the body and consequently of the spirit. And the same is the case of all beginners and imperfecter souls about all other sorts of sensible devotion.

[1] *Fioretti*, Chap. 32. [2] *Ibid.*, Chap. 28.

THE FORTY-FIRST CHAPTER

He showeth here that one is ever to be in this exercise of love, whether by *act* and *deed* or by *will* and *desire*. For, as he saith, it is impossible by reason of the frailties and infirmities of our bodies to be always actually in this exercise, and yet we may be always in it by *will* and *desire*. And therefore there is discretion to be used in this as well as in other exercises. For otherwise a man may harm his body and so disable it for this exercise in the time to come. And this being the exercise for which man was created, he ought always to have it in practice or in desire. But as regards other exercises, as eating, drinking, sleeping, etc., a man is not to have them in continual desire, but rather forbear them and take them only when he must. For he was not made for them, but should use them only so far as they may help the body to serve the spirit in the exercise of love.

THE FORTY-SECOND CHAPTER

Our author showeth that *discretion* is to be used in regard to our corporal necessities, and in all our outward doings, by holding a mean and taking or doing neither too much nor too little. And here he showeth how one may best learn to practise this discretion. He says that it is best acquired, not by reflecting on those things themselves with solicitude to hold a mean in them, but by tending towards God in the exercise of love. And then will God impart to the soul fitting discretion for those external actions. This discretion, saith our author, is best had and practised in those external things *by a recklessness about them*—that is, by not loving them or affecting them. He means that a man should neglect them and love only God and look only after him, taking those external things as it were in his way and as things that he would only make use of for the time, that he may be able to hold on in his journey, and not for any love he beareth to those things themselves.

I would to God that all contemplative spirits would well understand this point, for then they would find that their use of creatures, or their distractions, or even sins incurred through frailty, would be no impediment to them; yea, that no creature could hinder them.

They should and might use creatures according to their need, as if they cared not for those creatures—which is a *recklessness* of them—and then would they be no hindrance, but rather a help unto them. And if, having such a firm will of seeking only God, they should forget themselves and happen to take more of meat, or drink, or sleep, or of other things, than perhaps nature did need, yet might they soon make amends for that and turn such defect to be as nothing. And this they should do by still holding on in their way, notwithstanding such defect incurred through ignorance or frailty. *Get meat and drink*, saith our author, *when thou canst get it*. As who should say: "When thou needest it or thinkest that thou needest it, take it if thou canst get it, and if thou canst not get it hold patience." If thou canst get but less than perhaps thy nature needeth or desireth to have, content thyself with it. And do thou also the same if thou have not thy meat in such time, or of that quality, or so dressed, as thy nature would have it. And on the other hand if obedience or the providence of God do offer thee meats that are the most precious or dainty, or do propose meats to thee in great plenty, be not afraid to take thereof what thou thinkest is fitting for thy nature. And if thou happen to forget thyself and take more than nature needed, make no matter of it, but let it pass, and hold on thy further way towards God, and all will be well. Love neither meat nor drink, and be not solicitous thereof, nor seek after unnecessary extraordinary fare, but content thyself with what God sends, be it coarse or dainty, according to the needs of thy body. Set not thy thoughts or affections on any of these things, but take them as they come and as things that thou wilt not rest in; but let thy will be firm and settled to seek after God, and never to rest in anything save only in him. Be of this will and mind, saith our author, and thou shalt know and have discretion how to make a right use of creatures, which otherwise, standing on thy own natural wit, observation, or industry, thou wilt not be able to do.

In this sense it may well be said that *to the clean all things are clean*. And on the other hand, they who do not look after God nor labour for his love, aspiring towards him and seeking after him—it is very hard or rather impossible that they should use creatures aright or hold discretion about them. But they needs must turn all that they do so as to satisfy their nature; and consequently all that they do is

out of order. Whether they eat, drink, sleep, or whatever else they do, there is impurity some way or other in their doing; so that one may say that *to the unclean all is unclean*; for they hold true discretion in nothing. But they who aspire after God, and have grounded and settled their wills and desires therein, do pass over creatures, as also over those excesses which through ignorance or frailty they may have committed in the use of them, as things of nothing, looking only towards that which is before them—that is, God and his love.

THE FORTY-THIRD AND FORTY-FOURTH CHAPTERS

HERE he shows how good a thing it would be that *a man should not feel his own being*; by which is meant chiefly the feeling of the body. For if one were come to that case, then should he find no impediment, but the powers of his soul might clearly, quietly, and without distractions contemplate God according to the manner of this life, exercising perfect love towards him. For all our impediment, or at least the principal impediment, in our exercise towards God is our body and our feeling of it. Our soul is deeply plunged and as it were buried in it, in such manner as if we were nothing at all but a gross, heavy, and darksome thing, unapt to elevate itself or to be elevated towards God, or to contemplate him, or to be united to him, who is a spirit and not a body. And until a soul attain this not-feeling of herself and her own being, she doth but regard herself and the things of the body, and not God and the things of God. Now all the meditations or considerations that can be, will not cause in a man the not-feeling of his own being. While his exercise is in sense and imagination, he is full of his own being and feeleth it abundantly, and almost nothing else. I am of opinion that the feeling of one's own being will never be taken away, nor the contrary, which is the feeling of one's own nothing, ever acquired, until the soul come to be abstracted and dwell above in spirit, as if she were in some sort separated from the body. Of this abstraction, and the manner of it, you will find more written in the introduction.

The *sorrow* of which our author speaketh in the forty-fourth chapter is nothing else but a loathing of himself and of all things

besides God, and a desiring only to have God, and that his will should henceforth be done with him and all creatures, together with an aspiring and a tendance of the soul towards God. This is the sorrow and desire that he means, and not any sensible or direct sorrow for sins. For he doth not think of sins, but doth transcend them as he would transcend all creatures. The sorrow he speaketh of is a secret or implied will that he had not sinned.

But indeed it is hard and scarce possible to understand our author's meaning about sorrow in this chapter, until one has experienced the exercise of love by aspirations or elevations. And I may say the like in regard to divers other passages of the *Cloud*—namely, that nothing but a man's own experience in himself can enable him to understand them.

THE FORTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

Here he treateth of certain perils and erroneous proceedings in internal exercises. The only and secure remedy against all those mischiefs is to proceed by the will of the superior soul (as is done in acts and aspirations), and not by an unnecessary use of the understanding (as is done in too much discursive exercise), nor by plunging one's self overmuch into sensible devotion. Excess in discursive prayer (meditation), and indiscreet and excessive yielding to sensible devotion, do cause the mischiefs mentioned by our author in this chapter. But a quiet tendance by our superior will (as practised in acts and aspirations according to the divine call and enablement) will secure one from these and all other mischiefs and perils.

THE FORTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

He prosecuteth the matter of the preceding chapter, bidding one to proceed softly and quietly, avoiding impetuousness, violence, force, or boisterousness, especially in the body or sensuality. By *lust* he means the will, and by *lustily* he means an exercise of the will. By *rudely* he means forcibly or in sense. But *learn*, saith he, *to love softly and sweetly, with a demure and amiable countenance, as well in body*

as in soul. For a man must not use overmuch force in the exercise of his superior will, much less in seeking to raise devotion in the body.

THE FORTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

THIS chapter containeth a still, quiet, and resigned manner of prayer in spirit. The matter can hardly be expressed better than the author himself hath here expressed it, although it seem somewhat obscure. He that should go about to expound it would prove obscurer. So fareth it about these spiritual matters: if the text cannot be understood, then no more will the commentary be understood. Experience and nothing else will enable one to understand these and all other mystic writings.

THE FORTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

HERE he teacheth that the devotion which descendeth from the spirit to the body is better and more secure than that which beginneth in the body, as commonly doth the sensible devotion of those who have not yet attained by the exercise of acts to the exercise of aspirations. He saith that the person who has the former devotion can in no wise suspect it or doubt that it is from God. But the case is different with the devotion or sweetness that cometh from without or ariseth suddenly within the body, thou knowest not whence or from what cause. Such devotion or sweetness may and ought justly to be suspected, because it may be wrought either by a good or by a bad angel. Whereas the devotion that descends from the superior will can be wrought only by God. He teacheth also that, if a person continue in his exercise of the will, he may remain secure from any doubtful devotion. For God, to whom he joineth himself in this exercise, will one way or another discover unto him the truth or falsehood of the devotion, since the man doth not settle his affection upon it, but upon God himself, to whom he adhereth by his exercise of the will. And this doctrine about sensible devotion may be applied equally to all manner of comforts, visions, apparitions, revelations, and other extraordinary favours

and graces—namely, that if they be false they will not hurt a soul that is not attached to them, but still holds its will to God.

By a *lusty stirring of love* he means the motion of the will towards God; and where he calleth it a *blind work*, he means that it is without discourse or images, as taking place merely and only in the will.

THE FORTY-NINTH CHAPTER

Here he continueth to speak of the happiness and security that those enjoy who hold still to the exercise of the will: as is done in acts, aspirations, and elevations. Therefore he saith: *Stick fast to this meek stirring* (or motion) *of love, and follow the guidance of the same; for it will be thy guide in this life and bring thee to bliss in the life to come.* Mark how he saith that the will (that is, the exercise of it) will be his guide, and bring him through all difficulties, and free him from all errors and perils of temptation. For, when the will adhereth immediately to God, nothing can come between them, and so nothing will be able to hurt such a man.

THE FIFTIETH CHAPTER

Oh, how clearly doth our author here deliver the true doctrine about the use of extraordinary favours! He adviseth that we have a *recklessness* about those graces and favours. By this he means that we should have no affection towards them, but hold our affection continually only to God himself.

THE FIFTY-FIRST CHAPTER

Here he speaketh of the harm that cometh by understanding things *sensibly* and *corporally* that should be understood only *spiritually*. For although a man be driven to use the same terms for spiritual matters as are used in corporal matters, yet the reader ought to have the wit and judgement to understand them spiritually and not corporally; for else he clean misunderstands. But indeed men are so sensual, and so much given to the exercise of the imagination and understanding, and so little to that of the will and spirit, that it is no

marvel that they do as they do. And therefore is our author so serious in his admonition about it. And I wish you to observe his admonition well, and to see that you do not understand things corporally which are meant only spiritually.

THE FIFTY-SECOND, FIFTY-THIRD, AND FIFTY-FOURTH CHAPTERS

HERE he treateth of the honest, plain, simple, and secure lives, both interiorly before God and exteriorly before men, of those who proceed by the will. They are free from all solicitude about their external behaviour, in words or in deeds; they seek to please not men, but God; they desire not to be esteemed or honoured by others, but walk as it were with an open heart, free from all dissimulation and false meaning. And on the other hand our author showeth the false, perilous, subtle, and hypocritical behaviour of those who walk by the exercise of their wits. These are solicitous to please men and to be esteemed by them, and yet in the end they are cheated of their hope. For they must needs come to be discovered and known for what they are.

THE FIFTY-FIFTH AND FIFTY-SIXTH CHAPTERS

I NOTE nothing special in them.

THE FIFTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

HE speaketh here of certain devotions which men make with their own imagination, or which the devil works in their senses or bodies. But all these perils are avoided by the exercise of the will, which is above the imagination and above the workings of the devil. Those who practise meditation are much exposed to thesĕ perils, for they may use their imagination extravagantly, or the devil may strike in and represent what he please to the imagination or to the outward senses. For he hath power, so far as God permits, over all corporal

thing, having its seat in the head. But all these perils are avoided by continuance only or chiefly in the exercise of the will. I say "or chiefly" because a short meditation that suddenly falleth into an act of the will hath not the said perils in it. But they occur principally in subtle, curious, or long discourses, such as are much used nowadays, with less profit than might be got from shorter discourses that were presently directed and carried into acts of the will.

THE FIFTY-EIGHTH, FIFTY-NINTH, SIXTIETH, AND SIXTY-FIRST CHAPTERS

He teacheth here that in our work of love we are not to imagine a place or other bodily thing, but to proceed simply with our will, which being spiritual is without time or place, and so is indeed neither up nor down, above nor below, but rather as it were nowhere. The imagination, being a bodily instrument, frames and imagines times, places, and bodies; but not so the superior will, for she is blind and in such blindness heaves herself up to God.

THE SIXTY-SECOND, SIXTY-THIRD, AND SIXTY-FOURTH CHAPTERS

Other authors express the three powers of the superior soul by the names of *memory*, *understanding*, and *will*; but our author uses the terms *understanding*, *reason*, and *will*. So that the power which others call *memory* our author calls *understanding*, and that which others call *understanding* our author calls *reason*. But both he and all agree in the name and term of the *will*.

THE SIXTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

He treateth here of the *imagination* and of the natural unruliness of it.

THE SIXTY-SIXTH CHAPTER

Here he treateth of *sensuality* and of the nature of it.

THE SIXTY-SEVENTH CHAPTER

HERE he treateth of what is *beneath* a man's soul, as are his body and the senses and powers of it; and so also are all other bodily things. He shows also what things are *equal to* the man's soul. Thirdly, he shows what is *above* a man's soul, and that is only God. Yet to him the soul may become *equal* by union; but that is by grace and not by nature.

THE SIXTY-EIGHTH CHAPTER

THE *nought* here mentioned is God, to whom the soul may be united *when she is nowhere bodily*, nor hath in her any image of creatures. And *when she is nowhere bodily then she is everywhere spiritually*; and being in such condition she is fit to be united with the said nothing, which also is in all places. In reality this is a union of spirits, of the man's spirit with God's spirit, there being in neither of them any bodily image or thing. And this union I have elsewhere called a *union of nothing with nothing*.[1]

THE SIXTY-NINTH CHAPTER

THE *nowhere* and *nought* mentioned in this and the next chapter are but the state of abstraction. For in this state of abstraction the soul seeth her own being nowhere and seeth the nothing of all other things. And this is the sight of God, so far as it may be had in this life. For all other things being removed out of the sight of the soul, nought remaineth in her sight but God, who is the foresaid nothing. God may be called *nothing* because he is none of all the things that we can imagine or understand; but in himself he is indeed as it were all in all, as being the cause of all other things.

THE SEVENTIETH CHAPTER

HERE he showeth that for the exercise of love, which is practised in the will only, a man must for the time lay aside the use of all his

[1] See the Postscript, p. 217.

bodily senses, as well outward as inward. For those bodily senses are not able to bring a man to the nowhere and nothing which he seeks to attain; for they always bring him to something and not to nothing.

He showeth also that all the doctrine of this book of his is taken out of the writings of Saint Denis. That you may see this more clearly I shall here put before you a principal passage out of the same Saint Denis, the which containeth in it the whole substance of the teaching of the *Cloud*. These are the words of Saint Denis: *Tu autem, Timothee, relinque sensus et sensibilia exercitia, et etiam intellectuales operationes, et omnia sensibilia et intelligibilia . . . forti conatu mentis . . . et sicut tibi est possibile, consurge ignote ad unitionem Dei qui est super omnem substantiam et cognitionem.*[1] That is: "Do thou, Timothy, leave the senses and sensible exercises, and all sensible and intelligible things, keeping them under or suppressing them with a strong endeavour of thy mind (and this is the *cloud of forgetting*), and rise up (this is *consurrection* or *elevation*) unknowingly (this is the *cloud of unknowing*, or the darkness of faith) to union with God, who is above all substance and knowledge." Thus you see our author's words in this chapter are verified.

THE SEVENTY-FIRST CHAPTER

HERE he showeth how diversely God dealeth with souls, enabling some more than he doth others. And he enables souls in divers manners, bestowing his grace and ability as he pleases. A soul has but to do her best, by using her industries and disposing herself, and then to be resigned to the will of God. In such resignation is her perfection to consist.

THE SEVENTY-SECOND AND SEVENTY-THIRD CHAPTERS

HERE he showeth that none is to judge that God deals with others as he deals with himself. Indeed, this is a usual error, for we are apt to

[1] *Mystical Theology*, Chap. 1. This quotation is from the paraphrase (*extractio*) of Vercellensis.

think that there is no way but that by which we ourselves are called. Whereas God giveth divers calls, granting to one more favours than to another; and therefore, in this matter of spiritual ways and graces, no one must judge another by himself.

THE SEVENTY-FOURTH CHAPTER

THIS chapter treateth of the right use of this book, and who is fit to read it and who not.

THE SEVENTY-FIFTH CHAPTER

THIS chapter telleth how one shall know whether he be called by God to this exercise or not. He also speaketh of some privations or desolations that may come to a follower of this work.

Lastly, note the saying of Saint Augustine, that *all the life of a good Christian man is nothing else but only a holy desire*. This is an aspiring and tendance with love towards God, for union with him and fruition of him. May his holy grace vouchsafe to bring us to it.

END OF THE COMMENTARY

POSTSCRIPT[1]

OF THAT MYSTIC SAYING "NOTHING AND NOTHING MAKE NOTHING"

UNDERSTAND and bear in mind this mystic saying, being taken out of the practice of arithmetic, in which one, being to add together two ciphers, says, as I have done: Nothing and nothing make nothing. And now this may be applied to betoken and express mystical union. For when the soul hath cast out of her understanding all natural images and apprehensions, and out of her will all loves and affections to creatures, then is she become, as to all natural things, as if she were nothing: being free, naked, and clean from them all, as if she were indeed nothing. For so she is in that case, and for the time, as to creatures. But when she, being in such case of nothing, apprehendeth God also as nothing, that is to say, as no imaginable or intelligible thing, but as another thing that is above all images and species and is expressible by no species, but as it were nothing—as being none of those things which may be understood or conceived by any image or species—and that she doth further apply and add her own foresaid nothing to the said nothing of God: then remaineth there, neither as in respect of the soul nor as in respect of God, anything but a certain vacuity or nothing; in which nothing is acted and passeth a union between God and the soul. I mean that—the said nothing elevating and uniting herself to God and apprehending him according to his totality and without any image of him—there resulteth and ariseth nothing; as I said, that in arithmetic nothing and nothing make nothing. And indeed, in such perfect union between God and a soul, she hath no imaginary apprehension either of herself or of God; but being—as truly they are—merely spirits, they remain in a nothing, which yet may be termed a totality. And by this you may conceive what an active mystic union is. For it is caused by an

[1] The little essay printed here is item No. 5 in Father Baker's *Remains*, which is a collection of twenty-three short pieces on spiritual topics. There is a complete copy of *Remains* at Downside Abbey (Baker MS. 22).

application of the soul—being for the time rid of all images—to God, apprehended according to faith, without any image and above all images. And so, in this case of union, there is nothing and nothing and they make nothing. For the less there is apprehended by way of image in such union, the purer is the union; and, if it be perfect, there is neither time nor place, but a certain eternity that is without time or place. So that the soul, in that case, discerneth neither time nor place nor image, but a certain vacuity or emptiness, both as in regard of herself as of all other things. And then is it as if there were nothing at all in being, saving herself and God; and God and she not as two distinct things, but as one only thing; and as if there were no other thing in being. This is the state of a perfect union; which is termed by some a state of nothing, and by others is with as much reason termed a state of totality. Because there God is seen and enjoyed in it, and he therein as the Container of all things, and the soul as it were lost in him.

END OF THE POSTSCRIPT

DA AMANTEM ET SENTIT QUOD DICO: DA DESIDERANTEM, DA ESURIENTEM, DA IN ISTA SOLITUDINE PEREGRINANTEM ATQUE SITIENTEM ET FONTEM AETERNAE PATRIAE SUSPIRANTEM: DA TALEM ET SCIT QUID DICAM. SI AUTEM FRIGIDO LOQUOR, NESCIT QUID LOQUOR.

(S. Augustinus, *In Joannem*, 26.)

INDEX OF NAMES

(*The page numbers cover both text and notes*)

Aaron, 94–5, 96
Adam, 5, 41, 109, 189, 190
Albert the Great, St, x
Alphonsus Madriliensis, 155–6, 195
Ampleforth Abbey, vi, 4, 101, 130
Antichrist, 77
Aristotle, 134
Augustine, St, xi, 18, 30, 31, 50, 51, 83, 85, 100, 134, 216, 218

Baker, Fr Augustine, vi, xi, 40, 53, 151, 153, 158, 159, 217
Barbanson, Fr Constantine, 157, 158; *see Secrets Sentiers*
Bartholomew, St, 142
Benedict, St, 16
Benjamin, 116–17
Bernard, St, xiv, 20, 26, 43, 47, 50, 119, 174
Bernard of Quintavalle, Brother, 205
Beseleel, 96, 97
Blosius, Abbot, 153, 155, 159, 164–5
Bodleian Library, vi, 155; MS. 856 (Latin *Cloud*), vi, 7, 8, 9, *and passim*; MS. 576, 130; *see also* Douce
Bonaventure, St, xiv, 19, 20, 43, 124
Bremond, Henri, 153
British Museum, viii; Harleian MS. 674, 101
Butler, Abbot Cuthbert, 18, 31

Cambrai, 151
Cambridge University Library, 9, 86
Canfield, Fr Benet, *see* Fitch
Carthusians, the English, 153
Cassian, John, 16
Catherine of Siena, St, vii, 160
Charterhouse, the London, 28, 40
Chaucer, vii
Chauncey, Dom Maurice, viii, 153
Collins, Fr Henry, viii

Dante, 43
Denis (Dionysius) the Areopagite, ix–xv, 4, 93, 120, 139ff., 151, 152, 183, 215
Douce (Bodleian) MS. 262, 40, 130, *and see under* Greenhalgh; MS. 322, *see Scala Claustralium*
Downside Abbey, 217

Edward III, vii, viii
Exmew, Bl. William, viii, 40

Fitch, Fr Benet, 152, 153, 156, 157, 159, 164, 182, 191, 195, 197, 199
Francis of Assisi, St, 205

Gallus, Thomas, *see* Vercellensis
Gardner, Edmund G., viii, 120, 130, 131
Grande Chartreuse, 50
Greenhalgh, Dom James, ix, 28, 34, 46, 48, 50, 52, 53, 67, 73, 77, 84, 91, 92, 93, 98
Gregory the Great, St, 18, 51, 77, 99

Guigo, Dom, 50; *see Scala Claustralium*

Harphius, 159, 179
Henry VII, 151
Herp, Henry, *see* Harphius
Hilton, Walter, vii, viii, ix, 20, 28, 46, 48, 50, 67
Hodgson, Dr Phyllis, v, vi, viii, x, 101, 130
Houghton, Bl. John, 153
Hugh of St Victor, xiv, 73

Jerome, St, 73
John, St, 41, 124, 126, 127, 134
Julian of Norwich, vii
Justus and Pastor, SS., 117

Lawrence, Bl. Robert, 153
Lollards, vii, 77

Martha, St, 31–8, 185
Martin, St, 78–9
Martyrology, the Roman, 117
Mary Magdalen, St, xiv, xviii, 18, 24, 29–38, 39, 41, 185, 186, 196
Mary, Our Lady St, 11, 14, 28, 29, 123, 190, 195
Masseo, Brother, 205
Merton College, xiv
Missal, the Roman, 3, 108
Moses, 94–5, 96, 142, 143

Nicholas of Cusa, xiv

Ovid, 84

Parkminster, 40, 153
Paul, St, 21, 54, 83, 113, 177
Pembroke College (Cambridge), vi
Peter, St, xix, 41
Plotinus, 144

Rachel, 116
Richard III, 151
Richard of St Victor, ix, xi, 7, 19, 25, 31, 43, 47, 67, 85, 95, 97, 116
Rolle, Richard, vii, ix, 67
Romuald, St, 177
Rouen, 132
Ruysbroeck, Bl. John, vii

Sarracenus, Joannes, ix, 93, 139
Scala Claustralium, vi, 39, 50, 55, 79
Secrets Sentiers, 157, 159, 164, 176, 177, 182, 197
Simon the Leper, 38
Solomon (Book of Proverbs), 107–15
Stanbrook Abbey, vi, 151
Stephen, St, 78, 80
Suso, Bl. Henry, vii

Tauler, John, vii, 188
Teresa of Avila, St, 160
Thomas Aquinas, St, xiv, 20, 47, 51, 85
Thomas (Gallus) of St Victor, *see* Vercellensis
Timothy, St, 139, 140, 152, 215
Tregoose, Dom William, 28

Underhill, Evelyn, viii

Vercellensis, ix, xiii–xv, 139, 140, 141, 148, 215
Victorines, xiv, 20; *and see* Hugh, Richard, Vercellensis

Webster, Bl. Augustus, 153
Wilmart, Dom André, 50
Wood, Anthony, 153
Wyclif, John, vii, 77

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